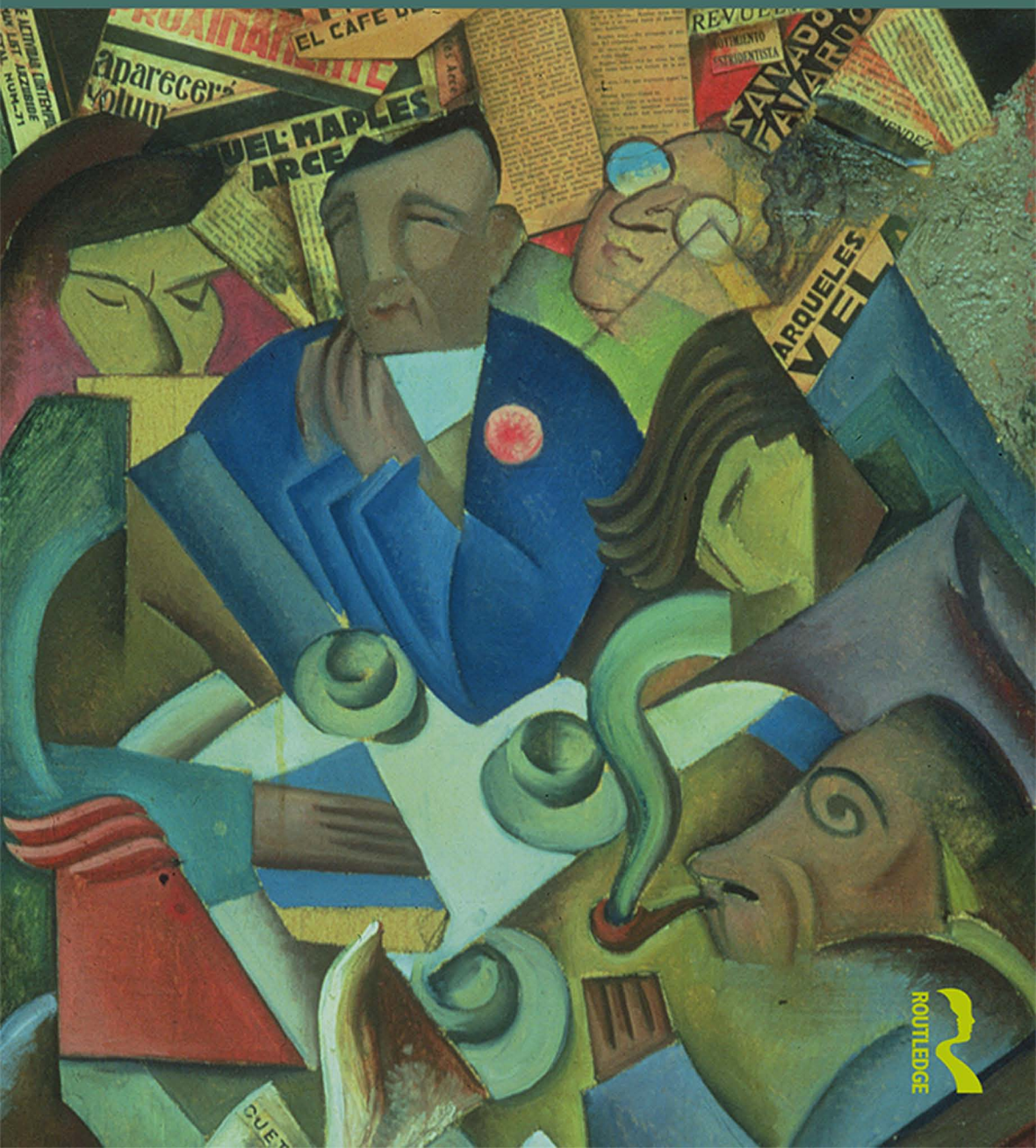
Words in Time

A Plea for Historical Re-thinking

Francesco Benigno



ROUTLEDGE

WORDS IN TIME

Through questions such as 'What is power?', 'How are revolutions generated?', 'Does public opinion really exist?', 'What does terrorism mean?' and 'When are generations created?', *Words in Time* scrutinizes the fundamental concepts by which we confer meaning to the historical and social world and what they actually signify, analysing their formation and use in modern thought within both history and the social sciences.

In this volume, Francesco Benigno examines the origins and development of the words we use, critiquing the ways in which they have traditionally been employed in historical thinking and examining their potential usefulness today. Rather than being a general inventory or a specialized dictionary, this book analyses a selection of words particularly relevant not only in the idiom and jargon of the social sciences and history, but also in the discourse of ordinary people.

Exploring new trends in the historical field of reflection and representing a call for a new, more conscious, historical approach to the social world, this is valuable reading for all students of historical theory and method.

Francesco Benigno is Professor of History at Teramo University, Italy, and the author of several books, including *Mirrors of Revolution: Conflict and Political Identity in Early Modern Europe* (Brepols, 2010).

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Francesco Benigno

Translated by David Fairservice

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This English edition is considerably different from the original Spanish edition (*Las palabras del tempo. Un ideario para pensar históricamente*, Ediciones Cátedra 2013) and from the Italian edition (*Parole nel tempo. Un lessico per pensare la storia*, Viella 2013). The present book is divided into two parts, the first dealing with early modern European history and the second with contemporary history. Two chapters ('Stato moderno' and 'Mediterraneo') have been omitted and an entirely new chapter on 'Terrorism' has been added. Moreover, the chapter on 'Identity' has been partially reworked. These changes were all suggested by Routledge's anonymous readers whom I also thank for their very stimulating and helpful comments on other aspects of my book. The responsibility for any errors and omissions is naturally mine alone.

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INTRODUCTION

Writing history at a time of memory

In order to observe the world, even before we are able to reflect on it, we need, as Walter Lippmann wrote, to categorize it: the concepts we use determine the shape of things, how we see them and even the choice of things that we see (and hence of the things that we do not see): 'For the most part we do not see first and then define, we define first and then see.'[1] For Lippmann, who developed his thinking on the basis of an average citizen who acquires knowledge of the world through the media, the perception of social reality depends on what we already know and on the preconceptions which we have interiorized, so that such knowledge is largely an elaboration of the already known, a re-cognition. Lippmann's classic insight essentially concerns average people contending with the complexity of the world as it is portrayed by the media but in fact even experts, commentators and social scientists are engaged in the same discourse: it is a problem which they are neither free from nor immune to.

Within these latter groups, the reflection about the role of fundamental concepts, which serve as beacons to illuminate reality and hence to study it, has not always developed coherently. Especially among historians, there long prevailed a traditional empirical approach, which was often inspired by a conception of the writing of history as an artisanal product, as an artistic rather than a scientific artefact, and hence subject to scant conceptual formalization. Beyond this traditional empiricism, time-resistant theoretical positions have been advanced over the years which has stressed the transparency of sources, their direct connectedness to an objective reality, the reality which was coherently ordered by being expressed in a written form and thus needed no more than being explored through tried and tested methods of philology. In practice this approach not infrequently entailed a simple appeal to common sense. On the other hand, historicism's clear insistence that there should be a nexus between history and theory and that historical enquiry should therefore be characterized in terms of problems came under increasing

pressure as it faced a decline in ethico-political social history with its concomitant theoretical-idealistic orientations. So it would happen that the long heyday of social history, despite its solid theoretical framework (however anachronistic it may appear from the present-day vantage point), generally gave little heed to the categories which it employed, that is, the categories used both by the historical players and by the historian as investigator.

It may be useful at this point to recall the intellectual dispute initiated by the first important revisionist historian of the French Revolution, Alfred Cobban, whose target was historians whose goals were, in his words, to 'decerebrate history'.[2] Cobban opened the discussion in the 1950s at a time of the ascendancy of economic and social history based on quantitative research and drawing inspiration from Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre's acclaimed 'Annales', then under the editorship of Fernand Braudel.[3] Cobban's dissent from the prevailing approach to writing history – mirrored a critique advanced against social discipline of his time, that is, both functionalist sociology and structuralist anthropology – which promoted reconstructions of past events which marginalized the role of the conscious ideas of the leading players and which ascribed human actions to the play of deep invisible forces, generally below the level of consciousness, which, although they could not be presented as laws of nature, somehow mimicked their strength and ineluctability. These were presumed to be social or socio-historical laws whose promptings individuals, surrounded by a network of constraints and constrictions, were, willy-nilly and often unwittingly, obliged to follow.

Since then the debate aiming to reassert the role of the ideas of historical players, has made such headway that it now seems taken for granted. And this provides the necessary starting point for any reconstruction respecting the past as viewed in 'its own terms'. In the last two decades of the twentieth century the ongoing debate generated a marked sensitivity for the so-called privilege of the past and an aversion for the old vice of anachronism which often accompanied it. This generally implied not only a greater respect for the past as seen in its own terms (mindful of Otto Brunner's lesson, one is tempted to add, a past re-read using its own lexicon) but also a keener awareness of the conscious opinions of its historical players, of their political options and of their value systems.[4] It is this third facet which was the trump card of revisionist objections to traditional social history. The discovery of the remoteness of the past, now seen as 'a foreign country',[5] led to a crisis of the taxonomic confidence with which historians, borrowing models from contemporary sociological and anthropological theories, ordered the world.

This antiteleological bias was accompanied by a growing awareness – among both historians and social scientists – of the need to reassess their own conceptual baggage, the tools of their trade and the interpretative instruments on which they relied. The journey was often fraught with problems. More than half a century after Cobban's entry into the debate, historians and social scientists are certainly no longer prisoners (but not in perpetuity, not once for all, it should be remembered) of the functionalist and structuralist models which claimed to be able to explain social

reality. This is not to say that in the meantime there has been a thorough-going scrutiny of the legacy of received ideas which, lying as they do more or less below consciousness, orient the choices of investigators through mechanisms not dissimilar to those which sway the ideas and actions of social (or historical) players. There is still validity in Pierre Bourdieu's warning that we should not fudge the knotty problem of questioning the concepts we ourselves use. Indeed, he went so far as to define this crucial stage as an imperative condition for collective and individual lucidity. Hence it was a realization of the ingrained relationship with the authoritative, intellectual legacy which becomes a discipline's standardized language, and its received wisdom: we need such reflexive mindfulness, as he puts it, so as to avoid both unwitting obedience and unintentional repetition.[6] As well as this new awareness, it was also a way of distancing oneself from the passive and subservient role so aptly described by Michel de Certeau:[7] traditionally the historian, like a know-all placed *auprès du pouvoir*, fulfils the mimetic function of retracing the prince's moves and intentions. Over time similar servile functions were subjected to criticism by other social sciences, in depth by anthropology and, perhaps less thoroughly, by sociology.

Such general willingness to rethink one's position was accompanied by the acceptance of the fact that no intellectual construct can be completely separated from a *Dasein*, from a social being basically defined by forming part of a group, the intellectuals, who are traditionally entrusted with the production and reproduction of culture; they are a group accorded legitimacy and special distinctive signs, and divided into 'fields', groupings of disciplines organized by corporations, academic institutions and professional associations; the various fields are crossed and in part sustained by authoritative traditions which provide each discipline not only with its own language but also with the conceptual framework which defines them, organizes them and accords them social legitimacy, a legitimacy which recently has certainly been dented and appears more and more in jeopardy.

In the case of history (and also of the social sciences), it was a period marked by the emergence of what has been called the 'linguistic turn' and concomitantly of a growing awareness of the profoundly discursive nature of all social analysis, which is generally based on documentary materials themselves organized on a discursive model. Significant contributions to this new orientation came from the hermeneutics of Paul Ricoeur and Hans Georg Gadamer, from the conceptual analysis of John G. A. Pocock and Quentin Skinner, and, above all, from Reinhart Koselleck's long-term historical-conceptual research, *Begriffsgeschichte*, as realized in the monumental Lexicon, conceived and edited with Otto Brunner and Werner Conze, and in an important series of essays from the same or a later period.[8] For Koselleck, as we know, the conceptual sphere is both indicative and resumptive of social change. Through the evolution of concepts, their semantic shifts, the rise of new words and the transformation of terms already in use, it is possible to detect changes, especially those which mark an epoch. Clearly *Begriffsgeschichte* does not exhaust the entire range of historical research. Koselleck was determined not to fall into a kind of panlinguistic idealism and he stressed the presence of non-linguistic primary

sources: such materials were necessary for historico-social research, even though their choice and elaboration were ultimately also linguistic. He thus created a conceptual approach accompanied by a historico-real approach. The result is that the enquiry into concepts proceeds in parallel with historico-social enquiry, even though the former has its own temporality and does not symmetrically correspond with the latter. Between the 'historical facts' and the written account of them there is created a continuous tension which produces both the change and the need to rewrite history by adapting it to the new conditions.[9]

Thanks to this concept, Koselleck aimed above all to identify the *Sattelzeit*, the period which founded modernity, a watershed or transitional epoch which occurred in the years 1750–1800: that is, the historical phase which saw the coming to the fore of the democratizing processes of political and social terminology, and of ideologizing abstraction which freed political and social concepts from the earlier and traditional contexts within which they were deployed. The new ordering of modern time, which was ontologically progressive and oriented towards the future, marked the prevalence of the so-called 'horizon of expectation' and so it disaggregated, transformed or ignored what Koselleck called the pre-existing 'spaces of experience'.[10]

However, and this is the crucial point, if the emergence of the lexicon of modernity has a privileged role in *Begriffsgeschichte*, then for Koselleck it is not only the lexicon of the period under enquiry but also of the period when he himself was living. Hence there is a discursive identity between the thinker's intellectual baggage and that of his historical players. In other words, the lexicon of modernity is made up of those political and social terms and concepts that came to be defined during the period of difficult gestation and signalled the transition from the *ancien régime*, and which, for Koselleck, continued to dominate the world, equipping it with its typical utopian/progressive orientation, its 'horizon of expectation'. However, for anyone now confronting the problem of analysing critically the inherited conceptual framework of received ideas, the question arises if the situation is still the same nowadays.

1 The distancing of the modern

For some time now we have been witnessing the development of a process of distancing the modern. That is, one notes a growing historicization of the period which once was (and no longer is) contemporary, which gives us an unprecedented possibility of establishing a periodization of the period, that is, both a *terminus a quo* and a *terminus ad quem*, and thus place 'the modern' in inverted commas. The concepts and the models which arose from that period and which enabled us to contemplate the world have become amorphous and beset by doubts, indicative of an intellectual perplexity which irremediably denaturalizes the social world and confers on it a particular patina which has the effect of making this world seem old and even antiquarian, with a sense of uncertainty which runs like a crack through what used to be its undisputed normality. The 'modern' has, in fact, become something old.

It is clear that this is not the first time that modern models have been brought into question as a great part of twentieth-century culture was imbued with just such a spirit of critical confrontation,[11] but today we are witnessing a phenomenon which is new, as are current approaches on offer to understanding the process of change underway: these speak of *a radical modernity* (Anthony Giddens), of *modernity at large* (Arjun Appadurai), of a *second modernity* (Ulrich Beck), of *postmodernity* and *liquid modernity* (Zygmunt Bauman).[12] These various formulations have the same underlying idea: the modern, or rather the concept of the modern, which was the distinguishing mark of 'the short twentieth century', is no more. Gone is the very sign of our time and we are left with a diffused sense that we are living in a second period of modernity which is different, extreme and extenuated, or even that we are living in a different world which is no longer modern and to which we are unable to give a name: lacking the appropriate words, we call it postmodern.[13] If these theoreticians are correct, at some stage in the last century there was a fault line, in Koselleckian terms, a new *Sattelzeit*, which was initially undetectable but subsequently revealed itself ever more clearly as a threshold beyond which things were no longer as before.

More is involved than just the crisis of ideologies, especially of progressive ideologies. It would be mistaken, for instance, to ascribe this change only to the growing strength of the conservative revolution. The neo-conservatism of the 1980s and 1990s, not to be confused with the traditional reactionary mind-set, is perhaps more an effect than a cause of this loss of modernity in its accepted sense. Neo-conservatism offered an ideological reading (performative as well as interpretative) of a process of radical restructuring of both economic and politico-social reality and of the conceptual framework used to think 'modernity'. This did not imply a sudden change, even if the speed of some transformations was simply staggering. It is rather as if the modern now showed itself as having 'grown old' and surviving in a disorganic and etiolated form; it revealed sporadic signs of life but also distortions, and contradictions.

One might first consider the idea of development, which is an economistic version of the encompassing idea of progress, a talismanic word which shaped much of twentieth-century sensitivity. In recent decades we have witnessed an epoch-making shift from the idea of development *tout court*, unlimited and theoretically infinite, which gradually evolved into the present, into the more cautious and guarded conception, which is more concerned with the conditions in which development takes place, with the costs which it imposes and with the risks it entails. A view has established itself which, unlike in the past, is more interested in the question of quality than of quantity and more mindful of development's continuation over time or, as we now say, of its sustainability over the medium and long term.

Consider first the crisis of certainty in the key aspect of the liberal view of history (which underlies all traditional left-wing interpretations of history), that is, the conviction that progress almost automatically brings with it a strengthening of democracy and a progressive spread of citizen rights. This certainty has come under severe questioning, as even a cursory examination of twentieth-century history

shows: we see the extension of human rights, but also radical forms of exclusion which reached the point of exterminating whole social, ethnic and religious groups. The twentieth century, seen as *un passé qui ne passe pas*,[14] continues to resurface, its face bearing the marks of its blunders and horrors, and reminds us of this radical disjunction which has taken place, once and perhaps for all, at the core of modernity.

Moreover, there is the basic dualistic model of politics as left versus right and its inability to take into account new cultural conflicts which emerged in the last three decades of the twentieth century: these conflicts (such as the student protest movement, the feminist movement and the demands for territorial autonomy) shaped politics in a new way by subverting traditional demarcations, radically reorienting politics and even forcing a redefinition of the basic left/right opposition. All this had a curious effect: the right jettisoned its traditional defence of constituted authority and of law and order, and appropriated the methods of protest, and the left, abandoning its rhetoric of struggle and the use of public places as the scene of political action, seemed intent on learning the art of good governance, and on safeguarding social and civil rights.

Finally, we witnessed the crisis of the identification of what is right with legality, and of the political community with the state as the sole sovereign body. And, more generally, the collapse of the centrality of the state and the discovery that, in its place, democracy had made way for so-called 'polyarchy', a multiplicity of powers laying claim to autonomy. This was clear proof that the distinction between political and civil society was becoming blurred as uncertainty grew about the definition of public powers, and even of the concepts of the general interest and the public good. After the horrors of the twentieth century, there seems to be no Leviathan able to muster unconditional collective belief, just as no welfare system seems able to accompany unfailingly a person 'from the cradle to the grave'. In the face of the omnipotent state, there persists a suspicion of its excessive encroachment, which often turns into frank misgiving, if not open resistance to its claims.

Confronted by all this, social reality becomes opaque and difficult to read. Individuals now socialize and acknowledge one another according to patterns which no longer give a pivotal role and the key to identity to a person's economic standing. In Europe and in the USA, everybody could nowadays be defined as 'middle class', if the adjective did not risk being meaningless: the once abused term no longer describes individuals in political terms, it does not imply religious adherence or even specific binding norms of behaviour, and it does not presuppose shared values. Groups form and distinguish themselves from other groups along different lines of demarcation, such as a certain lifestyle, and they recognize fellow members by cultural or religious orientation, by a sense of geographical or ethnic belonging, and by shared ties of identity based on common values. Above all, and partly because of this, social distinction tends to shun face-to-face contact and to rely directly on the world of electronic communication and on the powerful and pervasive virtual reality created by new media.

For all the reasons, only roughly indicated here, a conceptual historical approach such as the one proposed by Koselleck is no longer possible. If the world in which we live has its own, different mode of temporality, or, to use the term coined by François Hartog,[15] a new 'regime of historicity', then the conceptual framework employed needs to be critically assessed in a far more self-reflexive way than in the case of *Begriffsgeschichte*. It is no longer a question of writing the history of the concepts employed by the historico-social players but also the history of the concepts employed by researchers, by social and historical scholars. This is because, in the intervening period, a third and even more fundamental understanding, alongside the already mentioned conviction that an investigator's knowledge is embedded in authoritative traditions and is *campé* (it takes place, in other words, not in an ascetic laboratory but within social institutions), has come to maturity: this may be dubbed as the need to 'to take off the lab coat', that is, to renounce (with considerable pain!) the privilege of being on the other side of the table where objects are being analysed because of the conviction, learnt in the anthropology lecture, that the discourses of investigators and those of the historico-social actors are ethically, not ontologically, different. History is a non-Popperian science and, like other similar non-Popperian sciences (anthropology, sociology), it is a discipline open to natural language, which means that it is a science only in the restricted sense that its propositions must comply with certain standards, not because it is able to close the logical space of its statements, which instead freely move to and from the public sphere.[16] The chapters in this book dealing with conceptual analysis exemplify this affirmation, as the aim of such analysis is to operate with concepts which are, so to speak, amphibious, as they belong both to the sphere of the social sciences and to that of street talk: the attempt to investigate their nature strives to take account of both these spheres.

2 The challenge of memory

However, it was the emergence of a different regime of temporality, brought about by the blurring of the future and the distancing of the modern, which drastically changed the horizon of expectation, and with it the conditions enabling the writing of history to be practised. One viewpoint, which has been labelled 'presentism', places all its emphasis on the present and weakens or renders superfluous the causal connections which underlay historical explanation.[17] This confronts us with a radical questioning of the ability of historical discourse to give an account of the present by causal-based explanations. But more was to come. While the future, as has been said, has lost its lure and much of its luminosity, the past 'has more and more invaded our consciousness'.[18] However, this is not the historic past as we knew it, which is a necessary for the present and for the explanation of the real by chains of causation, but a new kind of past, the memorial past.

In the firmament of the public sphere, it was as if a dazzling new sun had appeared, memorial history,[19] which reduced history as traditionally understood to a pale moon borrowing reflected light.[20] So it has come about that history – progressive, rational, Hegelian, history articulated into phases and periods which map its evolution,

history situated in a linear, temporal framework – has been joined (and challenged) by an agnostic, emotive history centred on cyclical return or, in Nietzschean terms, 'the eternal return'. The former, history as we knew it, was history filtered through the expertise of professional investigators. The latter, inspired by the notion that memorial history is far too important to be left to historians, is, as it were, democratized history dominated by media professionals, journalists, commentators and popularizers. The key figure is no more the historian, the professional mediator, but the eye-witness who, alone, is supposedly able to recount things 'as they really happened'.[21]

The reason for memorial history's media superiority, and for its greater social appeal, lies in the fact that it encounters and, at the same time, constructs a new social narrative. Traditional history is conceptually imbued with the future which, in Walter Benjamin's celebrated essay on Paul Klee's *Angelus novus*, is a heaven from which blows a stormy wind, the future, which irresistibly draws the angel of history who, buffeted by the wind, moves with his eyes looking backward at piles of rubble.[22] It is here that the postmodern transformation can be seen. The new angel of history no longer goes to heaven but limits himself to accompanying us on a visit to a purgatory which repeatedly risks turning into a hell. So we find ourselves confronted by the phenomenon which Andreas Huyssen called the memorial obsession, and by the consequent musealization of Western society: a period oriented towards progress and the future has been succeeded by a 'backward looking period'. The future seems 'to fold itself into the past' and thus brings about the emergence of an unprecedented structure of hybrid temporality.[23] As a consequence memory takes the place of utopia and, in fact, as has been written, 'memory must be conceived within a horizon of expectation rather than within a space of experience, and is therefore something that has yet to be built rather than something to be exhumed'.[24]

For history as we knew it, the main focus of explanation was the episode which enabled the civilizing momentum to find expression in the pivotal event of revolution, while for memorial history the starting point lies in trauma,[25] a dramatic event which is able to transform the world not because it constitutes a stage in a journey but because it is a dramatic event which has scored people's lives and their memories.[26] In the former case, to reach an understanding of what happened is a complex intellectual exercise which calls for a sophisticated, prolonged and rigorous enquiry into its causes; in the latter case, understanding is replaced by identification and by instantaneous empathy.

At the core of traditional history's narrative is the slow, irresistible liberation of a person oppressed by some form of servitude imposed by an oppressor: the master narrative of this liberation (which is the liberation of the human race embodied in the various struggles for liberation) was the French Revolution, the *Grande Révolution*, the Revolution with a capital letter,[27] which fulfilled the role of providing a blueprint and a model able to inspire the whole course of historical studies. Nowadays this script has been replaced by another master narrative, centred not on the struggle between oppressors and oppressed, but on the sacrificial relation between individual or

collective victims and their executioner, a dialectic encapsulated and symbolized by the most ferocious war crime ever perpetrated, the Holocaust.[28] Just as the French Revolution was the model of many future revolutions, so nowadays the Holocaust has become the implicit model of the trauma of memory, replicated in numerous later episodes.[29]

One of the most persistent themes in the vast literature on the relationship between history and memory is the sacral nature or, in Gabrielle Spiegel's words, the liturgical nature, which memory assumes.[30] In this sacralization of memorial history the Holocaust is again decisive.[31] The return to the past is shaped by an emotive and impressionistic approach to the writing of history which creates a direct and dizzying link between the present and the unique and menacing event which needs to be remembered and exorcized and on which the identity of a people or a group is founded.[32] This creates a mystic aura shrouding the event as if the original trauma were at the same time a foundational act of identity, of death and of rebirth. The Holocaust is more than the event exemplifying all this but, as in the case of the French Revolution, it appears as a normative structure which gives, or perhaps, gives back, meaning (another meaning) to the whole of history. As Jürgen Habermas saw, Auschwitz changed the foundations enabling life to go on and history to be contemplated.[33] The Holocaust has a sacral awesomeness before which even Hayden White, the theoretician of modern Pyrrhonism, yielded: he accepted the idea that it was impossible to subject an account of the Holocaust to the usual deconstructive techniques of analysing the tropes of historical and literary narration which he had described in his *Metahistory* and in later works.[34]

So it has come about that a basically epic, historical and social narrative tends to give way to a tragic narrative focused on suffering[35] which, as the sociologist of culture Jeffrey C. Alexander observed, ends by being repetitive rather than cathartic: tragedy is redeemed by being relived but this does not mean that it is resolved. Identifying with the victims of a traumatic experience and pitying the unjust and cruel fate which befell them shield us temporarily, not definitively, from evil, which has become *sacred evil*, the archetype of our times. Such evil cannot be expunged, it lives within the human race and hence lives in each of us and in every society. Hence everyone is implicated, either as victim or executioner: evil is not the product of a 'more primitive' past, as the reassuring, progressive narrative promised, nor can it be seen as confined to 'another' and barbaric culture. Instead evil dwells where you do not expect to find it: at the core of modernity.[36]

Hence the twentieth century, with its burden of horrors, is more and more perceived as a looming presence and in this sense, as has been written, 'the past hangs heavy across the present' through commemoration which ends by becoming a genuine characteristic of our times, which have become nothing short of an 'era of commemoration'.[37] We are in the presence of what has been called 'the empire of trauma', and history as an account of the past is unable to escape its sway.[38]

If this diverse mode of conceiving temporality and history distinguishes our conceptual vocabulary from that of our historical players, there arises a problem of periodization. How are we to define and how date this transitional period, this

new *Sattelzeit*: several interpretative reconstructions have been put forward in answer to this key question. For Alexander, the changed perception of the Holocaust in American public opinion (from war crime to sacralized, universal trauma) was subsequent to the Vietnam war and to the decline which that war produced in the progressive historical narrative, a decline due to a loss of control by the USA and Israel of what Alexander rather enigmatically calls 'the means of symbolic production'.[39]

Perhaps the watershed event or period might be found in the loss of faith in, and the progressive crumbling of, the utopian idea of building a radically different society, of the hope that some kind of socialism might create the basis for a different future society, and also the failure, which was clear well before the dramatic fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, of a messianic reliance on some kind of *homo novus*.

It is within this context that Francis Fukuyama's article 'The End of History' should now be read again.[40] On publication it was deservedly stigmatized as the inaugural manifesto of a supposed new world under the control of a single superpower. It is of little account that Fukuyama aligned himself with the future planetary victory of liberal democracy and of the free market once the challenge, which Henry Kissinger in the 1970s called the never ending challenge, had been won: what matters more is that both the timely article, which appeared in *The National Interest* in the summer of 1989,[41] and the successive book of 1992, delineate a transitional phase, a turning point grounded in the acknowledgement that the twentieth century bequeathed widespread pessimism about history and made problematic a concept of progress exclusively based on scientific and technological progress.[42] Fukuyama shows an acute awareness about historical change and the effects it produced, as the growing powerful *nostalgia* for the past: something, he suggests, got broken. He thinks this is 'the end of history', a turning point capable to produce boredom and disenchantment; history naturally never ends but he advises us about the end of a certain 'regime of historicity' and the rise of a new one.

3 Traditional history vs memorial history?

After this brief outline of the contraposition of traditional and memorial history (an outline which serves, at least, to highlight the change in the temporal horizon which occurred) the two ways of writing history seem to belong to two cultural spheres which are quite distinct and actually provide mirror images of each other;[43] in fact, rather than being in contraposition, they accompany each other, intertwine and reciprocally influence each other.[44] It would be reductive and inappropriate to create a radical contraposition between secularized, 'lay', rational historiography and a sacralized, identity-based and emotive memory. Moreover, it may be pertinent to recall that over a long period historiography accompanied the founding of *ancien régime* churches and states and subsequently of nation-states by exalting their mythopoetic dimension and by defending their claims to legitimacy;[45] and in the same way historiography aided and abetted the birth and growth of modern Europe's great political and social movements, from liberalism to democracy, from socialism to totalitarianism.[46] Hence there is within historiography itself and not external to

it, a rhetorical and mythical dimension, which, in the course of its development, historiography had long to struggle against to achieve a critical and reflexive standpoint. It is patent that a complaisant history was part of the foundational process – replete with mythical, symbolic and at times sacralized elements – of states, churches and political parties; even if it is only recently, from the 1980s, that historiography has created an inventory of this by discussing, for example, the so-called 'places of memory'.[47]

This said, it should be noted that the appearance on the scene of memorial history is distinctly changing the face of history as a whole, above all by restating in new terms the old problem of historical truth, nowadays under unprecedented challenge. In fact historical and emotive reconstruction – which some social scientists identify not as history but as 'historical tales'[48] – creates a nexus of identification between the original trauma and the later story of the community as victim: from this derives the right which the community claims to shape its own memory and the right to 'its own truth' distinct from that of historical knowledge, which is perceived as something external and superimposed; from this springs the contraposition of memory, the problem of shared memory, and the contention to offer differing explanations of the one event, thus giving rise to the so-called 'memory wars'.[49]

At the same time, Auschwitz, the traumatic model which establishes the right to a 'community' truth has also become the battle station for anyone who, precisely by using the extreme example of the evidence given by the only survivor of a massacre, wants to assert, against denialism, truth as the goal and foundation of historical enquiry in line with a unique Western European paradigm which has supposedly maintained its validity since the time of Herodotus.[50] On the other side there is the strong tendency to read historical truth through what has been called '*le prisme des émotions*',[51] a perspective which inevitably stresses the subjective and experiential nature of historical knowledge.[52] By its link with the question of identity, what has been called the 'culture of feeling' ends by being the sole parameter of historical discourse, with the obvious risk of self-referentiality which this entails.[53]

It follows that the subject of truth, caught between the proliferation of studies of identity and the sacral status which the Holocaust confers on the uniqueness of this historical event, finishes by becoming crucial, the battleground between differing memories and the temptation of juridical normality embodied in the so-called 'laws of memory'.[54] This new centrality of the subject of memory's heuristic dimension then encounters the enormous possibilities of recreating the past which the new media offer, and the context which could be called the state of history in a time of reproduction of icons.[55] This is a totally new arena for the reconstruction and spectacularization of the past and has three basic features: first, history is partly removed from the control of professional historians, which in itself is not something new but has become far more evident than before.[56] So public history, transmitted by television and cinema, is more and more put into the hands of documentary makers, journalists, novelists, film directors and actors.[57] Second, one notes the centrality of the immediate responsiveness between past and present which relies on the powerful techniques used by film to reconstruct the past (and so produce

so-called *fictory*)[58] and on the need to achieve emotional effects rather than understanding, in keeping with a kind of neo-baroque *Weltanschauung* for which the goal is 'awe'. Finally there is the tendency for an ever greater importance to be given to the recent past, which is directly connected with the personal experience of a present-day audience who have no understanding of history.[59]

Lives are becoming longer, and objects and lifestyles are changing rapidly: in this situation media reconstruction reorganizes people's history around epoch-making dates which are marked by watershed events. In this way each of the periods into which a person's life falls takes on a patina of nostalgia, and becomes a world either to lament (the time of youth) or to keep at a distance, but which we are nevertheless bound to emotionally, a kind of vintage memorializing[60] made up of discarded objects, timeless music and indelible images which, like railway lines, run through our individual memory,[61] a recollection punctuated by the signs or milestones of our collective history which demarcate periods,[62] and which need to be kept alive, nurtured, confirmed and recalled to memory. In other words, the past, rather than being a mere given, is something which is continually being updated and re-presented so as it can be remembered. Individuals, fossicking in the pre-packaged public past which the old and new media offer, consume history which they themselves believe they remember but which they actually memorialize.[63] A rational and emotional circuit is created between the reconstruction of the past and memory where the former endlessly modifies and adjusts, or one might say 'retunes', the latter to the demands and needs of the present. This means that history is more and more associated with nostalgia, the possibility of reliving distant experiences. Or else that history becomes meshed with experiences of countries or places distant in time which are recreated, made natural and familiar, and to some extent commodified. We have an imposing new terrain for the reconstruction and spectacularization of the past, we have history for consumption, commodified history.[64]

It is clear that the new-found interest in the lived experiences of historical players, and in the analysis of the mental patterns of our forebears is linked to these processes now underway. In recent years this has given rise to the so-called 'history of emotions', the umpteenth of the numerous new directions in which historical enquiry has turned as if following mere fads.[65] However, emotion history, busy as it was exploring this new field of research, has not always seemed aware of the ties which connect it to the transformations just indicated.[66] This is despite the fact that there is an evident link between the rediscovery of the sentimental and emotional side of people in the past, and the new emotive model of the relationship between past and present which is proposed by memorial history.[67] Historians, clinging to their traditional empiricism, seem little inclined to adopt a reflexive position. However, this is a field in which closer attention given to the words used to indicate feelings and states of mind, and to the concepts underlying them, would help in the task of contextualizing and hence understanding, which is, after all, a historian's bread and butter.

4 Conclusion: a plea for critical history

Taking the transformations discussed above as a vantage point from which to observe the present historiographical scene, the present book attempts to lay stress on the importance of a renewed conceptual history as a necessary premise for reflexive and critical history which is able to take into account its own performative aspect, that is, the effects which its discourses have in the public sphere.[68] Our period is typified by an awareness of the inadequacy, or downright uselessness, of scientifically ascetic history confined to the ivory tower of knowledge, and indifferent to public discourse taking place outside its walls. The challenge now being presented by memorial history requires historians to respond on its own terrain, forcing them to 'get their hands dirty'. If the only response to the evident crisis in the humanities is to provide an answer, through hard work and in the absence of certainties, to the social need for history, then the role of a history of concepts, understood as a means of focusing attention on the categories which we claim to use as tools for understanding reality, present or past, would seem crucial. It is necessary for historians, teachers and also new workers in the field of public history to re-accredit themselves by monitoring their own intellectual tools of the trade. The aim of the present book is to be a contribution in that direction, to be a practical means of stimulating critical thinking about the premises of historical research.

Naturally, the intention is not to compile an inventory of ready-to-use concepts,[69] and even less a mini-encyclopedia, but to exemplify the particular trajectory which such concepts have taken in contemporary intellectual life, and to show the limits and boundaries within which these concepts may be used and how they may be enriched.

In the following pages, some seemingly outdated concepts are scrutinized. For instance, the discussion of *Popular culture* aims at a radical rethinking of the concept, given that the way in which it was generally understood by historiography and the social sciences is considered obsolete: this also serves to resolve the conceptual gap separating the European notion of popular culture deriving from Romanticism, and the American notion of popular culture, which notoriously has a quite different meaning.[70] In the discussion of other topics such as *Revolutions*, one cannot fail to note the urgent need to reassess long-persisting canonical viewpoints. The treatment of these two subjects should be read in conjunction with the discussion of *Violence*. Taken together, the three chapters strive to show the direction taken by research in the last three decades on social and political conflict in the early modern period, the decline of some outdated perspectives, and the vigorous advance of others.

Perhaps it is the chapter *Public opinion* which best illustrates another intention of the book, which is to clarify how every interpretation is also a choice, a stand taken, which involves the individual researcher. The reassessment of a given model, provided by Koselleck or by Habermas, which links the emergence of the so-called public sphere to a specific way of conceiving the evolution of Western society in the modern period leads to a delineation of that history which relies on bases which are markedly different. Hence the disclosure of the Schmittian roots of traditional historical reconstruction is accompanied by a decisive distancing from monistic culture

and an openly declared preference, ethical before being historiographical, in favour of pluralism.

The second part of the book, on themes of the contemporary world, analyses concepts – *Identity* is a case in point but *Power* also comes to mind – which appear to be both pervasive and indeterminate, and which need careful qualification to make their use possible. In recent decades it has been through the notion of identity that the crux of the matter has been approached, that is, how is one to read the social world, which the crisis of ascriptive macro-categories has brought into serious confusion. Again using the tool of identity an attempt has been made to break down and then build up the concept of collective aggregations. However, identity, rather than being an analytical tool, seems more like an inclination or a viewpoint which pays more respect to the subjective position of the social actors; that is, it is more inclined to recognize the autonomy of a person who acts 'without knowing how things will end' rather than the lucid heteronomy and facile teleology of the 'prophets of the future', the historians.[71] On the other hand, it is possible to use this category to scrutinize the recurrent tendency of social science, especially sociology, to imagine the world of the past as having characteristics opposed to the present-day ones, in fact, their polarized mirror image. There are reasons to think that the way in which some strands of contemporary sociological thinking (Bauman) tend to see the specificity of the present situation by contrasting it with 'modern times' is a topsy-turvy way of reproposing the old dichotomy of supportive community (*Gemeinschaft*) and anomic society (*Gesellschaft*), which is over schematic and helps to understand neither the past nor the present.

There are other concepts, such as *Generations*, which, despite the above mentioned crisis of ascriptive macro-categories, have recently acquired considerable appeal among both historians and social scientists. However, the tendency to reify the concept of 'generation' and to make it into a full-blown interpretative category leads, as will be seen, to results which are highly questionable if not downright absurd. Hence we need to place rigorous limits on the use of this concept: it is not events, or even shared experiences, which go to make up a generation but how such things are interpreted, how, often in a later period, they are thought through, and how they are represented by groups with a public voice who feel legitimized to speak for their contemporaries who remain silent (those whom we might call 'silent generational majorities').

Finally, the chapter on *Terrorism* attempts to vindicate the utility and importance of historical knowledge of subjects which, if attention is massively concentrated on the here and now, may become impoverished and lose their depth and significance. The history of the use of the concept *Terrorism*, far from identifying a phenomenon belonging to 'other' societies and cultures, thought as barbarous, tells us of behaviours which came into being within the Western world and which have constantly punctuated its history. Hence it is not a phenomenon produced by an 'alien' incursion but is something deep in 'our own' historical experience and has followed a trajectory which should cause us to reflect. Once again, history matters.

Notes

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> even large and grave events but History: that is, history understood as a single, coherent, evolutionary process, when taking into account the experience of all people in all times. This understanding of History was most closely associated with the great German philosopher G. W. F. Hegel. It was made part of our daily intellectual atmosphere by Karl Marx who borrowed this concept of history from Hegel, and it is implicit in our use of words like 'primitive' or 'advanced', 'traditional' or 'modern'.
>
> *(The End of History and the Last Man,* London: Hamish Hamilton, 1992, p. XII*)*

The subject of the end of history had been discussed by Alexandre Kojève in his famous lecture at the *Collège de sociologie* in Paris on 4 December 1937, in which he pointed out that the mysterious 'man on horseback' who for Hegel symbolized the end of history might not have been Napoleon, which is the usual interpretation, but Stalin. See E. M. Dale, *Hegel, the End of History, and the Future*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014, p. 97.

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PART I

Rethinking Early Modern Europe

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1

VIOLENCE

For some time now the subject of violence has exerted over historians, and social scientists in general, a power of attraction comparable to the power once exerted by the subject of revolution. In fact, it is in the field of revolutionary studies that such a change may most clearly be seen. The cultural climate preceding, accompanying and succeeding the bicentenary of the French Revolution already seemed to indicate a change in emphasis, particularly in the writings of English-speaking historians such as William Doyle and Simon Schama: attention could be seen as shifting from the analysis of the immediate or distant causes of the revolutionary rupture to its tragic dimension, and to its traumatic repercussions on people's lives. This change of focus became even more apparent after 9/11. If violence had long been considered an unfortunate but unavoidable effect of political and social change, as a brute fact inherent in change and hence seen as somehow natural (just as labour pains accompany birth, in Marx's famous words), so violence, freeing itself of its ancillary role to politics,[1] became a subject of study in its own right, as was shown by the appearance of general studies of violence,[2] of readers[3] and even of manuals on the subject.[4]

It would be a mistake to see this new orientation as merely the effect of a change in the political and cultural climate, that is, as the result of the rise of a revisionist (and politically conservative) reading of history which saw, in negative rather than positive terms, the generally accepted judgement on revolutions, which were no longer considered stages of Western civilization's glorious march of progress but as senseless tragedies, or at least as tragic errors resulting from misapprehensions, ideological fanaticism and factional struggle.[5] The new orientation signalled something more, and something different, which resulted from an intellectual transformation that had occurred in the intervening period. This included the questioning of progressive views of history and of grand progressive narratives; new attention to the cultural and symbolic dimension rather than to economic and

social factors; the prevalence of interest in the processes of communication involved in creating identity which went hand in hand with the deconstruction of the great ascriptive macro-categories (nation, class, religious belief). All this led to a profound rethinking of historical judgement on the twentieth century, the culminating point of Western civilization but at the same time the apogee of mass state violence.[6] More importantly, violence has taken on a central and constituent role in the new hegemonic scheme of historical memory, aptly named *liturgical memory*,[7] that is, as a necessary element of the sacral dimension which accompanies the symbolic and the mystical, identity-based appropriation of the past as embodied in the figure of martyred victims and their executioners.[8]

Using the astrological language congenial to historical players of the early modern period, one might say that violence emerged from the marginal or ancillary role which it had filled in the rationalist-historical constellation of Hegelian inspiration (revolution-progress-social change) with its narrative matrix of the *Grande Révolution*, and entered, now in the role of protagonist, a different emotional and memorial constellation of Nietzschean inspiration (executioner-witness-victim), the script for which is the Holocaust.[9]

Given the recent centrality of violence in historiographical discourse, it may be useful to reconsider some of the ways in which historiography, especially that of the early modern period, has dealt with the theme of popular violence over the last three decades. One of the most obvious limitations to be found in numerous historiographical approaches is the projection of violence on to a rather ambiguous entity, the armed crowd:[10] an opaque figure on which were foisted ideological concerns generally in quest of the authentic 'spirit' of popular actions in crowd behaviour. This raised the old question of the extent to which popular action was manipulated or hetero-directed, and the resultant anxious attempt to decipher autonomous codes which were genuinely 'popular' and were in some way distinct from codes of a broader culture. There was a consequent overvaluation of all elements conducive to delineating a 'popular' entity which was the vector of traditional and, at times, ancestral values which were supposedly 'revealed' by so-called rites of violence. There was a corresponding undervaluation of the interpenetration between the politics of élites and the politics of subordinate players. Violence was thus incorporated into a process of normalization/repression: popular violence, described as rooted in a 'natural' and insubordinate tradition, was set against state violence, imagined as innovative, rationalizing and orderly in a process which saw the triumph of Lent over Carnival, of the civilization of good manners over *sauvagerie*, and of disciplined control over festival/revolt.[11]

This tendency to ascribe violence to a predetermined, insubordinate entity highlights the other tendency to concentrate violence in someone other than us, in an entity carrying out dark and dirty work 'on our behalf', that is, publicly and literally, enacting humanity's disgusting, repugnant and terrifying aspect, which was thought of as primitive animality capable of barbarous deeds: ritual mutilations, physical and symbolic violations, the shedding of blood and guts, and even beheading and cannibalism. This is to forget that the starting

point of any discussion of violence should, in fact, be institutional and conventional practices, and the normal business of the violent imposition of social norms.

1 Rites of violence?

One of the most characteristic features of the way in which historiography of the early modern period has treated violence is its frequent recourse to the category of the rite of violence. The time is ripe for a careful assessment of this concept which, seen from a present-day perspective, seems questionable but, remaining untested, continues to be used as if out of inertia. The concept emerged and developed in the intellectually stimulating period of the discovery of *history from the bottom up*: at the time the possibility seemed within grasp of giving a voice to the popular classes who generally had never had one, and of making sense of actions which had previously been considered simply as the unthinking expression of primordial needs, as the rumblings of 'empty stomachs', or as merely irrational instincts. From the second half of the 1960s, and particularly after E. P. Thompson's enunciation of his concept of *moral economy*, there took place a process which radically broadened the range of meanings for the action of popular crowds. The then-fashionable structuralist and quantitative economic and social models, some of which were crude and mechanistic, were progressively questioned and critically discussed. At stake was the view of popular participants as passive subjects, virtually under the sway of impersonal and systemic forces and thus seen, so to speak, as mere chemical reagents in explanatory models dominated by the working of economic and social laws, such as the dictatorship of the economic cycle, regulated by the alternation of phases A and B, the *Hausse* and the *Baisse*, as theorized by François Simiand. In opposition to such economic and social determinism, which turned historical players into puppets performing a prepared script, the 1960s and 1970s witnessed the emergence of an interpretation which was more reflective and more attentive to autonomous forms of expression, in a word, fascinated with the so-called popular culture.

To put it as succinctly as possible, it may be said that the view of popular violence seen in ritual terms arose from the confluence of three concepts which, despite the considerable contribution they made to historical studies, nowadays all appear, each in its way, problematic. The first concept, needless to say, is 'popular culture' itself, that is to say, the belief in a coherent cultural universe, the origin of which is unclear, that interacts dialectically with another and equally moot concept, 'élite culture'; both are imagined as being so internally coherent as to make it possible both to trace, at least at a European level, general features immune from local differentiation, and to ground 'popular culture' in a Eurasian substrate which, as a concept, is even more complex and vague.[12]

The second concept is the armed crowd as an autonomous player, vector of what might be called a general subjectivity and hence an entity which by its actions supposedly expresses the desires, interests and aspirations of the popular world as a whole:[13] such a world is made up of acts and symbols which need to be

deciphered, and underlying this is what Edward Muir referred to as 'the mysterious alchemy of crowd behaviour'.[14] As a result of the so-called hermeneutic turning point in the last two decades of the twentieth century, the idea gained ground of interpreting crowd actions as a *récit*, a performance, and more or less metaphorically as a text.

The third element contributing to the formation of the idea of the rite of violence is naturally the actual concept of rite which entered historiography through the anthropological work of Max Gluckman among the Zulus in the middle of the twentieth century,[15] and particularly through the theoretical extensions of his pupil, Victor Turner, whose starting point was his close observation of the rituals of the Ndembu people in Zambia from which he developed the concept of *social drama*.[16] However, there was a significant shift of emphasis in the way that historians actually read the anthropology of ritual, and in their approach to the subject: the focus was no longer on the crucial problem of resolving conflict and restoring order (which is how Gluckman and Turner saw the problem), but on the possibility, mediated especially by historians' reading of Mikhail Bakhtin, of using conflict as a means of gaining access to an otherwise closed and impenetrable universe of signs and ideas.

In her celebrated essay on the rites of violence, the American historian Natalie Zemon Davis drew attention to the line of scholars (Georges Rudé, Eric J. Hobsbawm, E. P. Thompson, Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie and Charles Tilly) who made it possible to interpret the people outside the classic stereotypes of sixteenth-century literature (the Hydra, *la beste à plusieurs testes* and the like), and to grasp instead the political and moral traditions which legitimized or permitted the expression of violence.[17] These historians, Zemon Davis wrote, taught us to see the *ancien régime* crowds not as aggregations of rootless and precarious beings but, even if poor and marginalized, as belonging to communities with their own traditions and values. Above all 'we may see their violence, however cruel, not as random and limitless, but as aimed at defined targets and selected from a repertory of traditional punishments and forms of destruction'.[18] The people possess an array of punitive and purificatory measures which together create a fundamental reserve of *sense*: even in the most extreme cases of religious violence, crowds know what they are doing and sense that they are carrying out a legitimate act.

In the same period Yves-Marie Bercé, in a series of studies, above all that on the *fête-révolte*, put forward a possible way of studying violence as an expression of a universe of customs and feelings particular to the subordinate classes.[19] In Bercé's view, reasons for malcontent and protest found an outlet in the early modern period in ritual festive celebrations, such as Carnival, and did so by using a traditional array of playful jibes, role reversals and inversion of the norms of obedience and legitimacy which typified such festivities as a means of expressing a desire to restore an order which had been violated. The nexus between Carnival and revolt subsequently became a much-favoured subject among historians: one thinks of Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie's work on the Carnival of Romans,[20] or Edward Muir's study of the '*cruel zobia grassa*' in Udine in 1511.[21]

Seen from a present-day perspective, this insistence on the link between Carnival and revolt with its stress on primordial, bestial and materialistic elements, in keeping with a Bachtinian interpretation of Carnival as a typical expression of a quite different and distinct culture which was resistant to state modernization, raises substantial doubts. When Muir's and Le Roy Ladurie's books are now re-read some years after they appeared, they seem only in part to conform to the *fête-révolte* model, which posited the liberating and joyous eruption of popular rage; what these books actually illustrate appears more akin to the playing out of fierce and deeply rooted factional struggles. In the case of the 1511 Udine uprising, the '*cruel zobia grassa*', the bloody confrontation actually took place, as has been established, between two important family coalitions which were led by the Savorgnan and by the Della Torre, both backed by considerable but unequal material and symbolic resources.[22] Similarly, the violent clash which occurred in the celebrated *Carnival in Romans* in 1580 did not pit popular culture against élite culture, but should be situated on a common terrain which we call folkloric. As Le Roy Ladurie himself pointed out, at the feasts of Candlemas on 2 February and of St Blaise on 3 February, the notables organized themselves on the same terrain as their opponents and performed *reynages* (symbolic enactments) in competition with the *reynage* of the grouse staged by the adversarial group of artisans. This puts events in a context of factional divisions which relied on a shared culture in creating their own symbolic identities; hence the judge Antoine Guérin and the merchant draper Jean Serve, nicknamed Paumier, the leaders of the two opposing groups, do not seem to be bearers of alternative sets of values but are more like 'cultural brothers', as the same Le Roy Ladurie put it, moving like fish in water in one and the same imaginary zoological universe.[23]

The question then arises: in what sense was a common and shared folkloric culture *also* a typically popular culture (that is, one relating to the lower strata), which was the basis of Le Roy Ladurie's overall interpretation of events? And a further question arises: should an analysis of such a widespread, shared, political symbolism not also involve the heraldic tradition and even the far less popular and tendentiously exoteric study of emblems? Indeed, in Muir's book there are some thought-provoking pages on the symbolism of a decidedly aristocratic pursuit, hunting.

Another, and less well known, example of the misapprehensions which historians may encounter by focusing their attention on a concept of a culture considered to be profoundly alternative to dominant culture, is the 1630 Dijon revolt, which also occurred during Carnival. The event merits careful analysis.

On 27 February of that year 50 vineyard workers of the parish of St Philibert, led by one Anatoire Changenet, took to the streets with their wives and children and, to the strains of the song *Lanturelu*, threw stones at the houses of the treasurer-general and of one of the judges of the Court of Auditors. On the following day, the treasurer's house was destroyed, accompanied by the ringing of bells. For a long time the revolt was considered a classic tax revolt: Boris Porschnev and Charles Tilly saw it as an anti-state, class uprising, and Yves-Marie Bercé as a classic example of carnivalesque inversion and *fête-révolte*.[24]

However, a closer examination reveals that things were rather more complicated. On that very day, 28 February 1630, despite strong local opposition, Louis XIII's edict abolishing the provincial *états* and introducing *élus* in Burgundy was to be registered. Recent research has clearly shown that about one-third of those involved in the uprising had significant connections with members of the professions or of privileged bodies, for example with a godfather who was a lawyer or a notable. Moreover, many of those involved rented vineyards from landowners and belonged to confraternities which allowed mixed membership. The chronicle sources actually refer only to *vignerons*, that is, to paid workers who tended the vineyards (and at this point we need to bear in mind that contemporary documents, especially official sources, always sought to lay the blame for revolts on marginalized groups), whereas it has been established that the insurgents actually worked in various trades. We can say that the sources stress the link between the revolt and Carnival because such a link in itself constitutes some sort of explanation.

In fact, a large part of the local ruling élite was firmly opposed to the introduction of the *élus*. In the course of the uprising, the myth of Henri IV was consciously and repeatedly invoked. Moreover, the speech by the Keeper of the Seals, Michel de Marillac, who had come to Dijon to quell the uprising and to organize repressive measures, clearly reveals that the authorities were convinced that the local élites and the rebels were colluding. Marillac actually accused the notables of Dijon of having persuaded the people to believe that the king intended to impose *aides* on wine. As a consequence of all this, when Louis did arrive in Dijon, he curtailed the citizens' privileges and refused to swear an oath on them. Repression consisted in the exemplary punishment of a number of rebels, but above all in the humiliation of local authorities, which concluded in spring with the registration of the edict regarding the *élus*.[25]

The triumph of absolutism was to be short lived. In November of the same year, following the notorious *Journées des dupes*, which saw the rise of Richelieu, the fall of Marillac and the defeat of Maria de' Medici, the Dijon file was also re-opened. At this point Richelieu decided to allay dissent created by the introduction of the *élections* by inviting the deputies of the provincial states of Burgundy to present themselves at court to negotiate an agreement. The outcome was the restoration of the provincial states in return for an offer of 1.6 million *livres*. As a consequence of this agreement Dijon later closed its gates to the troops of Gaston d'Orléans at the time of his revolt. The city was rewarded by having its privileges restored.

Placing the main focus on politics, and how it was experienced and practised, clearly requires a broadening of the questions which need to be asked. Take the case of the concept of 'ritual plundering', which was introduced by Carlo Ginzburg in an essay of 1987,[26] to explain the disturbances which occurred in Rome on the death of Pope Paul IV Carafa in 1559: during a day of rioting on 18 August, the crowd went on to sack the papal palace, and to throw into the Tiber an effigy of the pope wearing a yellow beret. Ginzburg chose to categorize these events as an example of the rite of pillaging a dead pope's property, for which there is evidence going back to the Council of Chalcedon in 451, as well as some medieval examples.[27]

Using an approach similar to that of Zemon Davis, Ginzburg viewed the rite of pillage as an open model used by the rioters, much like a freely adaptable score or a Commedia dell'arte *canovaccio*. He pointed out that we are dealing with a rite which should be considered both customary and occasional. He might just as well have compared it to a subterranean river which occasionally comes to the surface, because the problem which his essay circles around (without ever resolving) might be succinctly stated as follows: not all palaces of dead popes, and even fewer palaces of cardinals elevated to the papal throne (which were at times liable to being ransacked), were pillaged.[28] Hence it is difficult to explain pillaging as an act which is ritual but does not mark a specific event (the death of a pope): the obvious deduction is that it was triggered by something else.

Even today, although the intellectual phase which saw the 'people' as the depository of a specific political orientation which may be described as conservative-resistant is now distant, the model of rites of violence (or of pillaging) still underpins some studies.[29] This may be seen in the work *I giovani e i morti* by Giovanni Ricci,[30] in which young people and youth violence seem, in terms of ritual, to occupy the place once occupied by the 'people': the young, Ricci writes, 'were allowed to express ethical and political claims denied to others, claims generically of an egalitarian and community nature' which were expressed through acts of ritual violence. Ricci was aware that there was something curious about his contraposition of the young, seen as champions of age-old traditions, and adults, depicted as projected towards innovation (he defined this as a 'strange conflict, counter to the orderly progression of individual time'),[31] and yet he applies it to the phenomenon of the 'entry', that is, the ceremonies accompanying the entry into Ferrara of important personages and the custom whereby crowds of young people tore to pieces the *baldacchino* of the person being welcomed. Hence the young were supposedly considered a ritual group standing for traditional culture seen as jeopardized by the aspirations to modernization of the authorities.

What is interesting is the mechanism by which the contraposition is created: on the one hand, we are presented with the scenario of a humanistic re-invention of triumphs and of the cavalcade symbolic of the act of taking possession, the revival of Plautus' comedies, the dazzling display of scenes from classical mythology and the Bible. In a word, we have the Renaissance and everything which nowadays we customarily consider part of the techniques by which tradition was re-invented; and, on the other, we have a description of collective actions and public behaviour which are considered as belonging not to the sphere of culture, as one would probably expect, but to the sphere of nature.[32]

Let us consider the case of the entry into Ferrara in 1473 of Eleonora of Aragon, the bride of Ercole I d'Este: immediately after her triumphal entry into the city, there took place the traditional assault on the ceremonial *baldacchino* which was torn to pieces and appropriated by gangs of youths. It is not without interest that the *baldacchino*, a work by the celebrated Ferrarese artist Cosmé Tura, is correctly perceived in the same perspective as his frescoes in the Palazzo, that is, as the blending of classical motifs for political and propaganda purposes. On the other hand, the act

of pillaging, or *mettere a saccomanno* as it was called, is seen as part of a 'natural' or anthropological ambit which was intended to express popular legality (supposedly embodied in the young men) which was independent from official legality. In other words, despite the fact that the action of pillaging is, correctly, compared, via Jean Starobinski,[33] with the ancient Roman custom of *sparsio* and *largitio*, this does not lead him to hypothesize that we are here dealing with ways of re-inventing tradition, but instead to posit an obscure, popular and subterranean tradition which somehow made its way from the Rome of Nero to the Ferrara of the Este.

2 Different from us

Let us come to the second question requiring examination: the constant tendency to see crowd violence generically not only as behaviour which is somehow ancestral, atavistic and primitive but which also springs from emotional drives, and which, above all, is contrary to the imposition of rational ordering by constituted authority. For example, William Beik sees the way in which *ancien régime* crowds behaved as depending on the existence of a distinctly popular *culture of retribution*, a kind of moral economy of violence. At work would be the transposition to a collective level of a common, individual reaction to acts considered offensive, that is, as damaging to people's sense of honour and to their ability to defend the property and lives of family members.[34] Such a perspective tends to diminish the strength and significance of vertical, social, factional and clientelistic links, and of the subterranean political tensions between different groups and strata. Let us look at a classic example studied by Beik in a recent article.[35] In Paris, on 24 April 1617 Concini, Maria de' Medici's favourite, was shot dead; it was, as we know, a murder planned by a state plot, from which the young king Louis XIII was not extraneous. Suddenly, some days after the event, a rioting crowd desecrated Concini's tomb and brutally mutilated his corpse: his ears, nose and genitals were cut off, and what remained of his body was thrown into the Seine. Several historians have pointed out the similarity of these acts to the way the corpse of Huguenot leader Gaspar de Coligny had been treated 45 years earlier at the height of the wars of religion. However, this time the breach was not religious but purely political. Public opinion did not accuse Concini of heresy but of abusing his influence to coerce the royal will, of amassing a huge fortune, of having the popular prince Henri II de Condé arrested, and of plotting for the throne.[36] Given this accumulation of crimes, it was not enough simply to kill him: he required far more serious treatment. The mutilation of Concini's body was accompanied, before and after the event, by a series of pamphlets, and of propagandistic and satirical prints.

In his analysis of this episode Beik puts forward a contraposition between what he calls *factional movements*, which aimed at the expulsion of one's enemies and the triumph of one's own political orientation, and genuinely popular movements, which tended to punish specific abuses, that is, acts perpetrated by individuals out of *anger* which sought to place limits on authority and to attempt to influence decision makers.[37] Beik points out that the proliferation of pamphlets would seem

to indicate official involvement in discrediting Concini and his supporters but, as it is difficult to imagine that officers of the king had organized such a thing, he concludes that the events seem to be the expression of popular justice. It should be noted that for Beik, contrary to historiographical tradition, organized demonstrations, with their parades, slogans, banners and other symbols of aggregation, and also festive rituals, were clear indications of lobbying and hence signs of the presence of a factional movement. Beik's point would meet with general agreement (as slogans, banners and symbols do indicate processes of creating factional identity), but his point is encased within a viewpoint which strives to prioritize the subject of popular autonomy in a way that seems to superimpose his own categories and concerns as a historian on those of his historical actors.

A clear proof of the problems which approaches of this kind entail may be seen in the famous episode in Naples of the killing, and mutilation of the corpse, of Giovan Vincenzo Starace, the people's elected representative (the verb *staraciare* would be used locally for half a century to mean 'hack to pieces').[38] Starace was lynched because he had been accused of authorizing the reduction in the weight of a loaf of bread. It should be noted that he was the mouthpiece for the requests of the vast majority of the population within the highest city body, the *Seggi*, and his was at that time a vice-regal appointment and hence he was at the bidding of the Spanish authorities. The event has been studied both by Rosario Villari[39] and Peter Burke.[40] The former stressed its socially subversive class nature, which was expressed in an inversion ritual (Starace was forced to ride facing backwards on a donkey, not a horse, and without his usual headwear): this was a clear reversal of standard protocol. The latter scholar, drawing on statements in contemporary texts insisting on the people's *sauvagerie*, laid stress on aspects of ritual violence: the intellectuals of the time wrote of the savage and violent nature of the 'lowest among the people', who had never been completely civilized by the Christian message, and of the 'mindlessness and brutishness of the plebs'.[41]

Was this really the case? Are we indeed confronted by a resurgence of animal instincts and by an outburst of atavism? It would seem not, to judge by two factors. One was the extremely harsh repression ordered by the viceroy Osuna, who apparently wept over Starace's body and probably became convinced of the existence of a plot aimed against himself. Proof of this was his reaction, which was out of all proportion had it merely been an act of retribution against the mob: 350 arrests were made in July and these were followed by tortures inflicted on many others and eight executions; in September there was another round of harsh repression. Among those found guilty were shopkeepers, employees of the *Sommaria* (court of auditors), scribes, employees of the Vicaria (the tribunal) and sundry tradesmen (a knife maker, a pasta maker, a horse-dealer), and above all some nobles, among whom there were even a D'Avalos and some Berlingieri. According to some observers, the uprising had actually been organized by the neighbourhood captains. To this must be added the interpretation which traditional historiography (from Domenico Antonio Parrino to Giuseppe Coniglio) has given of relations between the viceroy and the Neapolitan élites, which depicted Osuna as 'arrogant, harsh

and uncouth',[42] 'loathed by the nobility … and also hated by the plebs'.[43] Gino Doria summarized these various judgements by writing of Osuna as the '*bête noire*' of the nobility, and supported this assertion by adducing symbolic actions which attested to the viceroy's anti-noble bias such as making their representatives sit on bare benches rather than on special ceremonial chairs, or obliging them to stand bare-headed in his presence on a public occasion such as the wedding of the Duke of Andria's daughter to the Duke of Bovino.[44] So, even in the killing of Starace, there emerges a complex political situation which, rather than pitting the people against the nobles, was structured along vertical lines of division

Above all, even allowing that the killing of Starace depended on a distinctly popular 'culture of retribution', where did this culture come from? Beik's present-day thinking, which has shifted closer to the recent trend of the history of emotions, sees it as rooted in anger.[45] But this inevitably raises the question if it is possible to imagine a popular culture of retribution which is distinct from a general culture of retribution, that is, from a socially grounded and institutionally legitimized sense of what an infraction, and what a rightful penalty, are? And is this sense distinct from the retributive function of ordinary justice?

The person with the greatest responsibility for the killing of Starace was judged to be Giovanni Leonardo Pisano, an apothecary. The authorities, unable to have him arrested, ordered his house to be razed to the ground and its ruins to be strewn with two bushels of salt so as to symbolize, in classical style, that life would never return there. Where the house had once stood, a memorial of the event was erected, and into this were embedded the heads and hands of those who had been executed: the first of these hands had been cut off near the Sant'Agostino monastery, the usual meeting place of the popular authority, and the second hand in front of Castel Capuano, seat of the kingdom's oldest magistracies. These examples clearly show that a culture of retribution, far from being a distinctive feature of popular culture, is the same culture that informs the system of justice and a common culture of punishment. In fact, it is perfectly possible to draw parallels between the theatricality of so-called ritual, popular violence and the *Teatro della crudeltà* illustrated by Ian Luyken in the late seventeenth century,[46] or, in more recent times, to the *Theatre of Horror* of executions in early modern Germany as recounted by Richard van Dülmen,[47] and also to the *Splendore dei supplizi* in Lionardo Puppi's study.[48] In other words, there is what might be called a 'retributive circle' that drew on a range of suggestions and themes and, rather than relying on age-old traditions, was nurtured by re-reading known texts,[49] and by occasional rediscoveries, but was principally shaped by re-appropriating and incorporating the protocols of the legal system.

If the bodies of rebels, such as Masaniello, were beheaded and fed to the dogs, whether carried out 'officially' or surreptitiously 'delegated' to crowd violence, the act was in either case part of the concept of retributive punishment inflicted on a rebel found guilty of *lèse-majesté*.[50] Moreover, the entire story of Masaniello was replete with examples of popular justice mimicking official justice: during his 'dictatorship' as may be seen in a famous painting by Micco Spadaro, the bandits

were not only punished but were mocked by being paraded wearing cheap, metal crowns, while the heads of those executed were, as tradition required, displayed in cages.[51] This was not just a matter of exemplary punishments being inflicted on those guilty of serious political crimes, but of a common retributive culture which was applied even to minor crimes by the various kinds of pillorying practised throughout Europe.

For example, in 1697, half a century after the Masaniello uprising, the elected representative of the people in his role as magistrate charged with repressing certain crimes officially inflicted specified punishments: thus he made two dishonest fishmongers walk naked through the city with 'fish hanging from canes attached to their backs', while a butcher was made to parade with chunks of meat strung around his neck because he had been selling beef as veal.[52] Here again we have circularity and hybrid, composite forms of official retributive justice and of informal or, if you prefer, popular, justice, an intermediate zone between pillorying and what was known in some parts of Europe as *charivari* or rough music.[53]

3 Losing one's head

As we have seen, this series of concepts was recently broadened by the tendency to interpret violent crowd actions as springing from emotional drives. This is one of the results of what has been called the history of emotions.[54] Muir, who needed finally to indicate what had unleashed the actions of the Savorgnan faction in the notorious episode of the Udine revolt of 1511, had, at the time, attributed the violent behaviour to anger. He drew this concept from his reading of Renato Rosaldo,[55] an unorthodox *chicano* anthropologist whose approach has parallels with postcolonial and post-Said thinkers such as Chakravorty Spivak, Arjun Appadurai or Homi Bhabha. Rosaldo is the exponent of an anthropology which, rather than concentrating on the search for atemporal universals and for the identity of human nature, stresses the importance of social diversity, historical change and political struggle. From his study of the Ilongot, a people in southern Luzon (Philippines) who are given to the practice of headhunting, he came to a somewhat disquieting conclusion. If an Ilongot is asked, Rosaldo writes, why he chops off heads, the answer he will give is that it is anger, deriving from grief, which drives him to kill his fellow human beings. The act of lopping off a victim's head and throwing it into the air enables him to get rid of his anger and its underlying cause, his grief and his sense of bereavement. When the Ilongot spoke to him of the nexus between sorrow, anger and headhunting, Rosaldo was inclined to reject these explanations, he writes, 'as being too simple, inconsistent, thin, opaque, implausible, stereotypical, or otherwise unsatisfying'. 'Probably', Rosaldo observes, 'I naively equated grief with sadness, and certainly I had never personally experienced anything which enabled me to imagine the powerful rage Ilongots claimed to find in bereavement.'[56] Just such a personal experience shatteringly entered his life with the accidental death of his wife (and fellow researcher) during a field trip in 1981. 'Since that time', Rosaldo writes, 'I experienced the anger inherent in sorrow, the anger

which Anglo-American culture tends to ignore, and the Ilongot solution appeared much more in touch with reality than the Christians'.'[57]

Here we have a powerful appeal to the concept of an individual's 'positioning', or rather 'repositioning': his conclusion is that only an exceptionally powerful emotional experience can lead the observer to an understanding of the meaning which an act, for us inconceivable, such as chopping off a head, may have in a culture which is 'unlike ours'.

This interpretative tool, which, in a context unlike the one in which it was shaped, is nowadays taking on a totally new relevance (in part because of the hideous media portrayal of the beheadings carried out by ISIS), leads us to a larger question which also involves historians, and which could be thematized in these terms: are we sure that we can consider beheading as the product of a culture which is 'other' and which is for us, here and now, as 'barbarous' as it was for the ancient Romans? And do we consequently consider it a result of the re-emergence of an ancestral trait which, like Cesare Lombroso, we may safely place in the category of atavism?

In fact, in Western European history and culture, the act of beheading is far from being a sporadic and exceptional event. It would be banal to recall that the practice, attested since Palaeolithic times, was widespread among ancient peoples such as the Scythians described by Herodotus, the Tauri and the Celts; that a severed head was rooted in the *imaginaire* of the Greeks, as the head of Medusa was depicted on the shields of Athene and Jupiter and was etched in their memory by the head of Leonidas stuck on a pike by Xerxes after Thermopylae. One also reminds that the ancient Romans practised beheading as an institutionalized judicial practice, a form of public execution which was carried out on the battlefield or in specific designated places but, simultaneously, they condemned beheading as barbarous. One may also recognize that, with the guillotine, the French Revolution created a modern and self-styled 'civilized' way of beheading. Through beheading a clear demarcation was established between victors and vanquished, citizens and outsiders, civilized people and barbarians.

Despite repeated attempts to bring clarity to the matter, things were obscure and confused. The practice of displaying the head of a slain foe, both as proof of his death and as a symbol of submission, was common to 'barbarians' and Romans: the head of Crassus, the Roman commander, was presented to the Parthian king; the Assyrians took the heads of slain enemies to royal officials; Polybius recounts that the head of the Roman Caius was delivered to the Gaulish king; Pompey's killers, Plutarch tells us, offered his head to Julius Caesar; Trajan took back with him to Rome the head of Decebalus who had committed suicide; and for centuries the Eastern Roman emperor continued to receive the heads of rebels.[58]

Similarly, the notion of beheading as the victory of divine justice over a tyrannical enemy is found throughout the Old Testament, not only in the practice of receiving enemy heads, attested in the Book of Kings, but obviously through the exemplary stories of David who, after stunning Goliath with a stone from his slingshot, then used the evil Philistine giant's own sword to chop off his head,

which he then offered to King Saul; or the story of Judith who, to save her own people, cut off the head of the invading enemy, Holofernes. Drawing on these stories and on that of the beheading of St John the Baptist an important iconographic tradition came into being.[59]

Bearing this in mind, it is difficult to understand William Beik's amazement at the grotesque succession of heads which were carried on pikes in the first days of the French Revolution (de Launay, Governor of the Bastille, and de Flesselles, Provost of the Merchants of Paris, on 14 July, then Berthier de Sauvigny, food hoarder and queller of the flour war, and his father-in-law, Foullon de Doué, on 22 July): Beik speaks of an entirely new phenomenon, of a transition from traditional retribution to a much-vaunted revolutionary retribution.

Long before the historians, it was contemporaries who expressed amazement at what had occurred, the 'flaunting of heads as trophy'. Restif de la Bretonne's reaction is famous, as is Chateaubriand's, which was actually 'reconstructed' after the event. In his *Mémoires d'Outre-Tombe* he wrote: 'Those heads and others which I saw soon afterwards changed my political tendencies; I was horrified by these cannibal feasts and the idea of leaving France for some distant lands began to take root in my mind.'[60] However, this sense of bewilderment, inspired by the opposition of civilization and barbarity, should not lead to rash hypotheses, such as that the parade of heads on pikes expressed 'a new kind of emotion'.[61]

One may agree with the idea that this new rite, championed by the *menu peuple*, expressed a collective desire for liberation,[62] and also that descriptions of the parading of the heads of Sauvigny and Doué speak of the 'exuberant cruelty of a crowd out of control' and of 'an almost Freudian … return of the repressed', but it is more difficult to maintain that we are confronted by something new which is 'a combination of new revolutionary spirit and traditional appetite for retribution' and indeed by a revolutionary watershed in popular rituality.[63] One should consider not only the precedents but also the fact that the parade of severed heads continued in October, and that even children in the street famously played with cats' heads impaled on sticks.[64]

Beik's assertion that the parading of heads was a new phenomenon as there is little evidence of heads being carried on pikes in earlier centuries needs to be modified. Leaving aside the classical tradition[65] and medieval examples,[66] and remaining within the modern period, the picture is quite otherwise. Chronicles abound with stories of severed heads which were then taken to other destinations, especially during the long history of the Ottoman empire (and also in the case of those fighting the Turks, as Austrian troops imitated their enemies and sent the heads of slain Turks to Prince Ernst, Governor of Vienna). The heads, generally flayed and stuffed with straw, were attached to the tails of horses or mounted on pikes and carried by carts: this continued for centuries everywhere, and especially on the eastern border with the Moslem world, on the plains of Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria. In carrying out these practices, Christians were a match for Moslems: at Lepanto they displayed a pasha's severed head on a pike so as to dismay the enemy army; just as Mustafa Pasha, during the war for Cyprus, had the head of Nicola Dandolo, governor of

the defeated city of Nicosia, stuck on a spear so as to display it to the inhabitants of Famagusta who were continuing their resistance.[67]

In Naples, during Masaniello's revolt (1647) there were several cases of heads being carried in procession. Among these the case of Fabrizio Cennamo merits attention. He was a contractor and a magistrate who had been debarred from holding public office because he had been charged with graft. His case is interesting for the way in which he was executed (he was taken to the place of execution on a common chair, although he was accustomed to far different treatment) but above all for what happened after the event. His head, as well of those of two police agents who had been executed with him, were put on top of a pole and were paraded through the streets. Among the crowd which had gathered to witness the spectacle, there was someone who began to shout: 'They're looking, they're looking, get a move on, gentlemen, let's get a move on', mockingly repeating the words used by police escorting authorities through crowded law courts.[68] The inversion was a pointed reminder of his former position as a magistrate, and makes explicit the purpose of the punishment. Something similar had occurred in Florence in 1343 during the revolt against the Duke of Athens, when the *iudice delle ragioni*, Simone da Norcia, was executed and beheaded. He was known for the cruel sentences and tortures which he inflicted on his victims – a contemporary witness commented that he had been beheaded because he himself had had so many people unjustly decapitated: 'he had many people's heads cut off and the same thing was done to him'.[69]

However, this evocation of examples from the Balkans, from the oriental tradition, from Cossack customs, or even from that sort of 'quasi-oriental' country which southern Italy is for the English-speaking world, prevents us from breaking free from the model which opposes legitimate, modern and 'civilized' beheading, determined by a court sentence (or carried out with the guillotine), and savage beheading bearing the marks of barbarity.[70] Hence it is incumbent to cite examples from northern Europe.

For this we have Patricia Palmer's interesting study of the tradition of beheading in Ireland in the modern era.[71] Her thought-provoking account relates that, in the spring of 1642, during the confederate war, a company of Catholic soldiers laid siege to an English colony in Ballinekilly Castle in County Kilkenny. The besieged forces displayed the heads of some enemies they had killed, and the besiegers took to following suit.[72]

Palmer clearly shows the effects of the semantic contrast: the English called the Irish 'traitors and rebels' whereas the Irish used an intriguing expression and defined themselves as *men in action*. The upshot is that beheading, depending on the semantic context in which it is placed, may be seen either as something legal and civilized, or else as savage and transgressive. For the English authorities, Palmer observes, 'Irish beheadings were a confirmation of savagery; English beheadings were instruments of reform.'[73]

Palmer goes on to suggest that for a Counter-Reformation sensibility there was a spiritual consonance between mutilating the 'other's' body and mortifying one's own flesh even to the point of martyrdom. She cites two descriptions of the same

event, given from opposing viewpoints which are tellingly contrasted: the execution of the octogenarian bishop O'Devany. The tone of the Puritan description is satirical: it depicts as superstitious the people who touched the so-called traitor's body, who smeared their hands with his blood and appropriated pieces of his mangled body as relics. On the other hand, the description of the same scene from a Catholic viewpoint transforms it into a sacramental act of piety and devotion: O'Devany's head, in fact, was an object of veneration for a whole century and his was not the only one to be venerated. It may not be out of place to recall that there are numerous heads of martyrs venerated in Catholic churches, beginning with the first of the series, the head of St John the Baptist: it is kept in the Roman church of San Silvestro in Capite and, until as late as 1411, was annually carried in procession by no fewer than four archbishops.

This notion of the head as a relic and an object of veneration, when set alongside the severed head displayed as an act of contempt, suggests that even one of the most horrendous acts of violence cannot be removed from its cultural context and attributed either to an excess of violence, typical of the popular classes, and the quintessence of the animality of human nature, or to the unwitting result of instinctual passions: as if passions (or emotions) existed simply in and by themselves, and as if there were not a historical construct of passions and/or what are considered to be instincts.[74]

4 Conclusions: violence as judgement

It is not easy to consider anger over an affront without taking into account one's general idea of justice and one's specific idea of what is, and what is not, legitimate. There are acts of violence that we commit against ourselves and against others which are not considered affronts but as ways of making up and of making amends. Their function is not to create disorder but to restore a fractured order.

In other cases the attribution of violent acts to sudden impulses or to uncontrollable emotional drives is far from unproblematic. It is rather far-fetched to attribute to pure and simple anger, for example, the desire for revenge which a family nurses over generations thanks to a long and retentive memory of the wrongs they have suffered, and to the constant retelling of such wrongs: such is the basis of all feuds. In stories of feuds we come upon examples of people who commit horrendous acts not out of hate for other people (whom often they do not even know) but out of a sort of ethical imperative inculcated by the family group, and out of an obligation to comply with a moral duty to which they feel strongly bound.[75] In such cases emotional drives, such as anger, count for little: more significant is the feeling, or rather, the idea of honour, that shared value with which Mediterranean anthropology has long concerned itself, and which it has made virtually an ethnic attribute and an essential element of a putative Mediterranean mentality but which, in its double sense of 'honour as precedence' and of 'honour as virtue', was a fundamental cultural code.[76] However, it was not a code confined to marginal groups with folkloric traditions, but belonged to the very core of

Western élites and not only in the Middle Ages and in the early modern period: this is shown by the duel with pistols, which supplanted duelling with sabres, and was commonplace in elevated circles, social, military and political, well into the twentieth century.

Above all, we must be clear what we mean by violence. In a recent collection of essays on violence, Stuart Carroll advanced a definition of violence as 'an exercise of physical force so as to inflict injury or damage to person or property'.[77] This was an attempt to skirt the question of the legitimacy of an action by offering a rather problematic definition – as Carroll himself acknowledges – which, while including a number of sports, excludes from the category of violence an act such as throwing a copy of the Koran into the lavatory, as would seem to have happened in Guantanamo. It is easy to note that his definition is not only too generic, as it includes such diverse actions as bullying and genocide,[78] but, more importantly, it fails to be comprehensive: violence is not a thing but a matter of judgement.[79] It is the act of stigmatizing, the guilty verdict we pronounce on actions which we judge to be illegitimate or unjust. At times violence can be reified and mystified so as to create political enemies, to create for ourselves the status of victims and, by emphasizing the confrontational nature of violence, to create contrasting narratives of reality. This is not a matter of the play of *post factum* interpretations in which historians are only too glad to take part, but of the account shaped by witnesses and by descriptions in sources. An illuminating example is given by the case studied by Stephen White: ecclesiastical sources around the year 1000 openly stigmatized the violence of nobles, with whom they shared the same culture of war and the same military values and practices.[80]

In fact, if this were not so and if 'violent' were not understood as an act which, in a given cultural context, is considered, or felt, to be an unacceptable abuse of power, how are we to explain the perplexity of historical actors confronted by comparable acts which, in one cultural context, are accepted, but in another are recategorized, re-interpreted as violent and so decisively rejected? How to explain, for example, the disorientation of the Catholic Church in the face of the characterization of paedophilia as an act of absolute violence whereas some decades ago it was not categorized in this way? In this case, the shift in moral judgement now considers as violent the same actions which were once mere sins, whose contentious compatibilities and responsibilities need to be investigated. Instead, these actions are now stigmatized and are firmly gripped in the pincers of the new conceptual alternative of victim/executioner which assigns absolute importance to violence: so, through the concept of trauma, such actions are drawn into the constellation of memory, which is the new pole star of culture in general, and not only of historiography, in these early decades of the twenty-first century.

Notes

1 H. Arendt, *On Violence*, London: Harcourt Brace, 1970. But see, on the concept of revolution, Chapter 4.

2 There is a vast bibliography on the subject: see especially R. Muchembled, *A History of Violence from the End of the Middle Ages to the Present*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012 (1st edn Paris 2008); M. Nassiet, *La violence. Une histoire social (France XVI–XVIII siècles)*, Seyssel: Champ Vallon, 2011; J. J. Lozano Navarro and J. L. Castellano, *Violencia y conflictividad en el universo barroco*, Granada: Comares, 2010; K. D. Watson, *Assaulting the Past. Violence and Civilization in Historical Context*, Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007; A. Sen, *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny (Issues of Our Time)*, New York and London: Norton and Co., 2006; J. Canning, H. Lehmann and J. Winter (eds), *Power Violence and Mass Death in Pre-Modern and Modern Times*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004; C. Tilly, *The Politics of Collective Violence*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003; J. I. Fortea, J. E. Gelabert and T. Mantecón Movellán, *Furor et rabies. Violencia, conflicto y marginación en la Edad Moderna*, Santander: Universidad de Cantabria, 2002; J. R. Ruff, *Violence in Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
3 C. Besteman (ed.), *Violence: A Reader (Main Trends of the Modern World)*, New York: New York University Press, 2002; B. B. Lawrence and A. Karim (eds), *On Violence: A Reader*, Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2007.
4 M. Juergensmeyer, M. Kitts and M. Jerryson, *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Violence*, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2013; D. J. Flannery, A. T. Vazsonyi and I. D. Waldman, *The Cambridge Handbook of Violent Behavior and Aggression*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007; W. Heitmeyer and J. Hagan, *International Handbook of Violence Research*, Dordrecht and London: Kluwer Academic, 2003; L. A. Rapp-Paglicci, A. R. Roberts and J. S. Wodarski, *Handbook of Violence*, New York: Wiley and Sons, 2002.
5 This is discussed in my *Mirrors of Revolution. Conflict and Political Identity in Early Modern Europe*, Turnhout: Brepols, 2010 (Italian edn 1999).
6 M. Mazower, 'Violence and the State in the Twentieth Century', *American Historical Review*, 107 (2002), pp. 1158–78.
7 G. M. Spiegel, 'Memory and History: Liturgical Time and Historical Time', *History and Theory*, 41 (2002), 149–62.
8 E. Christianson and C. Partridge (eds), *Holy Terror. Understanding Religion and Violence in Popular Culture*, London and Oakville: Equinox, 2010.
9 See pp. 7–10, the pages dedicated to this process in the Introduction.
10 R. J. Holton, 'The Crowd in History: Some Problems of Theory and Method', *Social History*, 3 (1978), 219–34.
11 On social discipline see T. Mantecón Movellán, 'Formas de disciplinamiento social. Perspectivas historicas', *Revista de historia social e de las mentalidades*, 14/2 (2010), pp. 263–95.
12 See Chapter 2 on popular culture.
13 J. Walter, *Understanding Popular Violence in the English Revolution: the Colchester Plunderers*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.
14 E. Muir, *Mad Blood Stirring. Vendetta and Factions in Friuli during the Renaissance*, Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993, p. xix.
15 See especially M. Gluckman, *Rituals of Rebellion in South-East Africa (The Frazer Lecture, 1952)*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1954; Gluckman, *Order and Rebellion in Tribal Africa*, London: Cohen and West, 1963.
16 V. Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*, Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1963; Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-structure*, Chicago: Aldine, 1969.
17 N. Zemon Davis, 'The Rites of Violence: Religious Riot in Sixteenth Century France', *Past and Present*, 59 (1973), pp. 51–91.
18 Ibid., p. 52.
19 Y.-M. Bercé, *Féte et Révolte. Des mentalités populaires du 16e au 18e siècle*, Paris: Hachette, 1976.
20 Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Le Carnaval de Romans: de la Chandeleur au Mercredi des Cendres, 1589–1590*, Paris: Gallimard, 1979.
21 Muir, *Mad Blood Stirring*; see also F. Bianco, *La 'cruel zobia grassa'. Rivolte contadine e faide nobiliari in Friuli tra '400 e '500*, Pordenone: Biblioteca dell'immagine, 1995.

22 See the discussion of Muir's book in O. Raggio, 'Periferie del Rinascimento: Politica, cultura e archetipi. Il giovedì grasso di Udine (1519)', *Quaderni Storici*, 88 (1975), pp. 221–30; S. Lombardini, 'Dalle fonti della vendetta alla nemesi delle fonti', ibid., pp. 231–47; and a response by Muir, ibid., pp. 247–55.
23 Le Roy Ladurie, *Carnaval de Romans*, p. 374.
24 See M. P. Holt, 'Popular and Elite Politics in Seventeenth Century Dijon', *Historical Reflections – Réflexions Historiques*, 27 (2001), pp. 325–45.
25 M. P. Breen, 'Patronage and Municipal Authority in Seventeenth-century France: The Aftermath of the Lanturelu Revolt in Dijon', *French History*, 20 (2006), pp. 138–60.
26 C. Ginzburg, 'Saccheggi rituali. Premesse a una ricerca in corso', *Quaderni Storici*, 65 (1987), pp. 615–36.
27 A. Paravicini Bagliani, *Il corpo del papa*, Turin: Einaudi, 1994, pp. 227–9.
28 It is not at all clear what sort of rite it is that is *not* carried out, or carried out only on some occasions. How can such intermittent acts be included as the model of rites of passage studied by Arnold Van Gennep? Moreover, the connection with acts such as throwing a dead pope's effigy into the Tiber is far from clear, as is the anti-Jewish sentiment evidenced by the yellow hat placed on the effigy and by the riots outside Jewish banks which occurred in Gonzaga territory at the arrival of news (which was untrue) that Ercole Gonzaga, Isabella d'Este's son, had been elected pope in the conclave which actually elected the Medici pope Pius IV. Ginzburg's essay is also indicative of a tendency to read popular violence, unlike the violence of nobles or of an élite, as forming part of profound models which are basically transcultural (in Ginzburg's treatment, these link a day of drama in sixteenth-century Rome with Fijian customs) and hence can be seen, on a comparative basis, as similar, with a consequent undervaluation of the contingent and contextual factors which explain the political dynamics of public disturbances.
29 See, for example, Ottavia Niccoli, *Il seme della violenza. Putti, fanciulli e mammoli nell'Italia tra Cinque e Seicento*, Bari: Laterza, 1995.
30 G. Ricci, *I giovani e i morti. Sfide al Rinascimento*, Bologna: Il Mulino, 2007.
31 Ibid., p.17.
32 See, in this perspective, the article by Carlo Ginzburg, 'Charivari, associazioni giovanili, caccia selvaggia', *Quaderni Storici*, 17 (1982), pp. 164–77.
33 J. Starobinski, *Largesse*, Paris: Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 1994.
34 W. Beik, *Urban Protest in Seventeenth Century France: The Culture of Retribution*, New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997. See also his 'La participation politique du menu peuple dans la France Moderne', in B. Barbiche, J.-P. Poussou and A. Tallon (eds), *Contestations et comportements dans l'Europe moderne. Mélanges en l'honneur du professeur Yves-Marie Bercé*, Paris: PUPS, 2005, pp. 43–59.
35 W. Beik, 'The Violence of the French Crowd from Charivari to Revolution', *Past and Present*, 197 (2007), pp. 75–110.
36 For a general survey of the critiques to the minister-favourite see my books *L'ombra del Re. Ministri e lotta politica nella Spagna del Seicento*, Venice: Marislio, 1992; *Favoriti e ribelli. Stili della politica barocca*, Roma: Bulzoni, 2011.
37 Beik, 'Violence of the French Crowd', pp. 91–3.
38 See the anonymous chronicle of events: 'La morte di Giovan Vincenzo Storace eletto del popolo di Napoli nel maggio 1585', *Archivio Storico per le Province Napoletane*, 1 (1876), pp. 131–8. See also G. A. Summonte, *Dell'historia della città e del regno di Napoli*, Naples, 1750, pp. 204–5.
39 R. Villari, *The Revolt of Naples*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993 (1st edn 1967), pp. 23–4.
40 P. Burke, 'The Virgin of the Carmine and the Revolt of Masaniello', *Past and Present*, 99 (1983), pp. 3–21.
41 G. Panico, *Il carnefice e la piazza. Crudeltà di stato e violenza popolare a Napoli in età moderna*, Naples: ESI, 1985, p. 112.
42 D. A. Parrino, *Teatro eroico e politico de' governi de' Viceré del regno di Napoli*, Naples: Gravier, 1770, vol. I, p. 230.
43 P. Troyli, *Istoria generale del reame di Napoli*, Naples, 1753, vol. V, part II, p. 288.

44 For these judgements see M. Mendella, *Il moto napoletano del 1585 e il delitto Storace*, Naples: Giannini, 1967, pp. 20–1.
45 As Stephen D. White has pointed out, it is necessary to 'consider the possibility that emotion terms, like status terms, figure in different kind of texts, each of which may represent emotion differently and pose distinct interpretative problems': 'The Politics of Anger', in B. H. Rosenwein (ed.), *Anger's Past. The Social Uses of an Emotion in the Middle Ages*, Ithaca NY and London: Cornell University Press, 1998, p. 130.
46 I. Luyken, *Il teatro della crudeltà praticata nelli più severi tormenti del mondo*, Venice: Girolamo Albrizzi, 1696.
47 R. van Dülmen, *Theatre of Horror. Crime and Punishment in Early Modern Germany*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990 (1st edn, *Theater des Schreckens*, Munich, 1985).
48 L. Puppi, *Lo splendore dei supplizi. Liturgia delle esecuzioni capitali e iconografia del martirio nell'arte europea dal XII al XIX secolo*, Milan: Berenice, 1990.
49 For example, the celebrated episode in Book 22 of the *Iliad* in which Hector pleads with Achilles not to feed his body to the dogs and Achilles then drags Hector's dead body behind his chariot.
50 See in general the fundamental work by M. Sbriccoli, *Crimen lesae maiestatis: il problema del reato politico alle soglie della scienza penalistica moderna*, Milan: Giuffré, 1974.
51 The painting, entitled *Punizione dei ladri al tempo di Masaniello*, is in the Museo di San Martino, Naples.
52 Panico, *Il carnefice e la piazza*, p. 43.
53 The attraction to the theme is naturally connected with the heyday of studies of popular culture: see J. Le Goff and J.-C. Schmitt (eds), *Le charivari*, Paris: EHESS, 1981, which are the proceedings of a round table conference held in April 1977 at the Museo Nazionale di Arti e Tradizioni Popolari, with the participation of 60 historians, ethnologists and sociologists. For this period in intellectual life, see Chapter 2 of the present book.
54 See the survey by J. Plamper, *The History of Emotions: An Introduction*, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2015; S. Ferente, 'Storici ed emozioni', *Storica*, 15/43–45 (2009), pp. 371–92.
55 R. Rosaldo, *Ilongot Headhunting 1883–1974. A Study in Society and History*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1980; see also the collection of essays *Culture and Truth: the Remaking of Social Analysis*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1989.
56 Ibid., p. 3.
57 Ibid., pp. 10–11.
58 For this entire subject, see P.-H. Stahl, *Histoire de la décapitation*, Paris: PUF, 1986.
59 As was shown by Julia Kristeva in her study *Visions capitales*, Paris: Éditions de La Martinière, 1998; strangely her text makes little use of two works by René Girard: *La violence et le sacré*, Paris: Grasset, 1972; and *Le bouc émissaire, Étude comparée d'histoire des religions*, Paris: Grasset, 1982.
60 R. de Chateaubriand, *Memoirs from Beyond the Tomb*, edited by R. Baldick and P. Mansel, London: Penguin, 2014 (1st edn 1848), p. 104.
61 Beik, 'Violence of the French Crowd', p. 99.
62 'Everyone could see that this was a dramatic, revolutionary challenge to the existing order by ordinary citizens': ibid., p. 100.
63 'This characteristic symbol of the revolution was an expression of a new kind of liberation, not a throwback to barbaric ancient practices.' Challenging the positions of historians such as Arno Mayer, Patrice Gueniffey and Bronislaw Baczko who in various ways look on the crowd as a mass of primitive forces, Beik attempts to re-evaluate the aspect of its

> dramatic break with the past. The triumph of the revolutionary crowd, the displaying of heads on pikes, the adaptations of violent practices to new circumstances, the infusion of original symbols and ideological messages into the motivations of crowds, the focus on the whole nation rather than local interests, all these were new, as everyone knows.
>
> (ibid., pp. 108–9)

64 The subject of the book by R. Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History*, New York: Vintage, 1984.
65 A classic text, reprinted shortly before the Revolution, D. Barton, *Costumes des anciens peuples à l'usage des artistes. Nouvelle édition redigé par M. Cochin*, Paris 1784–6, gives several examples of beheadings; see Plate 88 in part 1, Plate 87 in part 2 and Plate 15 in part 3.
66 For example the parading of heads on pikes during the 1168 revolt in Messina in *Il libro del regno di Sicilia* of Ugo Falcando; citation from the translation U. Santini, Cosenza: Pellegrini, 1990, p. 135.
67 Stahl, *Histoire de la décapitation*, p. 43.
68 Panico, *Il carnefice e la piazza*, p. 121.
69 Marchionne di Coppo Stefani, *Cronaca fiorentina*, edited by N. Rodolico, Città di Castello: S. Lapi, 1913, p. 208.
70 This is stressed in R. Janes, *Losing Our Heads. Beheadings in Literature and Culture*, New York and London: New York University Press, 2005, in particular on p. 67.
71 P. Palmer, 'At the Sign of the Head. The Currency of Beheading in Early Modern Ireland', in S. Carroll, *Cultures of Violence, Interpersonal Violence in Historical Perspective*, Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, pp. 129–53.
72 'The mirroring actions of both sides, symmetrically reproducing the behaviour of the other, points yet again to the circuit of atrocity within which the severed heads operated.' These severed heads, displayed in no man's land for the other to see, themselves demarcate something, they are, in Palmer's words, a liminal object: 'The quasi magical allure of the severed heads for earlier culture lay precisely in its liminality, suspended between life and death, between this world and whatever lay beyond, between selfhood and annihilation': ibid., p. 141.
73 Ibid., p. 137.
74 S. Moravia (ed.), *Atlante delle passioni*, Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1993.
75 S. A. Throop and P. R. Hyams, *Vengeance in the Middle Ages. Emotion, Religion and Feud*, Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate, 2010; O. Raggio, *Faide e parentele. Lo stato genovese visto dalla Fontanabuona*, Turin: Einaudi, 1990; J. Wormald, 'Bloodfeud, Kindred and Government in Early Modern Scotland', *Past and Present*, 87 (1980), pp. 54–97; M. Gluckman, 'The Peace in the Feud', *Past and Present*, 8 (1955), pp. 1–14.
76 On this subject, see F. Benigno, 'Il Mediterraneo', in T. Gregory (ed.), *XXI secolo. Il mondo e la storia*, Roma: Istituto dell'enciclopedia Treccani, 2009, pp. 232–42.
77 Carroll, *Cultures of Violence*, p. 8.
78 J. Carter Wood, 'Conceptualizing Cultures of Violence and Social Changes', in Carroll, *Cultures of Violence*, p. 83.
79 For his questionable concept of 'violent crime' and his attempt to construct historical series, see M. Eisner, 'Long-Term Historical Trends in Violent Crime', *Crime and Justice. A Review of Research*, 30 (2003), pp. 83–142. For a different perspective, compare number 19/2 (2010) of *Tracés. Revue de Sciences Humaines* dedicated to 'Décrire la violence', in particular: C. Lavergne and A. Perdoncin, 'Éditorial. La violence à l'épreuve de la description', pp. 5–25. See also C. Strange, R. B. Cribb and C. E. Forth (eds), *Honour, Violence and Emotions in History*, London: Bloomsbury, 2015.
80 S. D. White, 'Repenser la violence: de 2000 à mil', *Médievales. Langue, texte, histoire*, 37 (1999), pp. 99–114. This derogatory meaning of violence, as the illegitimate use of force, is parallel to the concept of terrorism as illegitimate practice of war, illustrated in chapter 8, *Terrorism*.

2

POPULAR CULTURE

Since the late eighteenth century, the notion of popular culture, in the sense of folk culture, has constituted a significant aspect of European and American cultural life. Although the field of popular culture enjoyed a period in twentieth-century intellectual experience when it flourished vigorously, it is no longer in vogue. For some time it has disappeared from the intellectual scene and now seems akin to a discarded relic which attracts the interest only of archaeologists of culture, of collectors of outmoded ideas and of those nostalgic for a vanished world. Nevertheless, in the post-war period and until the 1980s, popular culture, in its various interactions with civil and political engagement, was an essential point of reference not only for the vanguard of historiographical research but also for other fields of the social sciences.

Now that past passions have abated, it may be useful to re-examine a concept which, straddling historical enquiry and demological research, influenced the direction of historical studies and produced results which, from a present-day perspective, undoubtedly seem questionable but which nevertheless continue to retain some hold over our way of seeing the *ancien régime*. In some cases, the conviction of the validity of the notion of popular culture left a legacy of intellectual works of continuing interest which, given the absence of a rigorous re-examination of the subject, float in a kind of timeless cultural dimension from which they are occasionally and inadvertently salvaged as if they were still operative. In other cases, some scholars, for the most part ethnologists studying folk traditions, have recently enquired into the roots of this fascination for what we might call 'the people we have lost'. Their ideas, which also find expression in autobiographical writings, deserve to be reconsidered as they offer interesting tools for understanding the rise, decline and demise of a concept which was long dominant.

1 The standard historiographical understanding of popular culture

Between the second half of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s, at the culmination of two decades of analyses involving all aspects of European historiography, articles and books by respected historians laid claim to the sphere of popular culture in the medieval period and during the *ancien régime* as a field which had been won by knowledge, and actually presented this process as something akin to a new canon of interpretation. For the medieval period, the names which come to mind are Jacques Le Goff,[1] who saw as 'a guiding principle' the contraposition between educated culture and 'popular culture', his pupil Jean-Claude Schmitt,[2] and the work of the best known Soviet scholar of collective mentality, Aron J. Gurevič;[3] for the modern era, one thinks of Peter Burke's general survey,[4] and of Robert Muchembled, whose book, although its scope was limited to France,[5] was cast in a similar mould, of the works by Piero Camporesi,[6] and of Yves-Marie Bercé on the nexus of festival/revolt.[7] Even with their diversity of approach, these works significantly converged – during those years (and for a short time thereafter) – on certain common ideas which defined for historians the standard notion of popular culture.

Attention was focused on a corpus of popular customs and beliefs which was considered to be substantially autonomous and distinct from the culture of the *savants*, a corpus imagined as permeating the whole continent and thought to be rooted in an ancient cultural substrate, which was very much alive in the Middle Ages, and remained basically intact until the very early modern period. This corpus was designated popular culture and, at times, folk culture. Described as originating from remote traditions, and thought of as bearing the mark of rites of passage and of mythological beliefs, it was essentially or prevalently an oral culture, with a naturalistic and magic matrix: it was a culture engendered by a precarious world dominated by death and disease. As popular culture was defined mainly in contraposition to the literary and bookish culture which was the prerogative of élites, it found its distinctive elements by being seen for what it was not, which led to it being indicated as a kind of residue which generally overlapped with whatever could not be related to the culture of the educated, the rich and the powerful. For instance, Peter Burke, in defining the subject of his book, identified the features of popular culture with what is generally defined as folklore, that is, a composite corpus of objects, beliefs and rites: 'folksongs and folktales, devotional images and decorated marriage-chests; mystery plays and farces; broadsides and chap-books; and above all festivals, like the feasts of the saints and the great seasonal festivals such as Christmas, New Year, Carnival, May and Midsummer'.[8] This residual world, whose boundaries were marked by the unceasing violence of the 'high' culture of the nobility and the bourgeoisie, which met resistance but finally proved unstoppable, was nonetheless ambiguously seen as the broken remains of an ancient cultural unity and of a world of ancient beliefs which had once existed in time immemorial and of which only fragments survived.

These two viewpoints, which nowadays might seem contradictory, were not perceived as such in an intellectual climate dominated by the contraposition

between the world of the people and the world of élites which was delineated in Mikhail Bakhtin's highly original and stimulating approach in his 1965 book on Rabelais, translated into French in 1970.[9] Thanks to Bakhtin, the traditional ethical tension of social history – the moral imperative to write history 'from the bottom up' with the aim of giving a public voice to those who had never had one – seemed to have finally found a possible way of investigating intellectual forms associated with the subaltern classes,[10] and thus to proceed to a new interpretation of *ancien régime* history as a whole; this was a way, so to speak, of responding to Brecht's famous call to write the history not only of Alexander the Great but also of his cook. What Bakhtin achieved in this work was to articulate a contraposition between a world of the flesh and a world of the spirit, the former understood as natural, spontaneous, instinctive and joyful, and the latter as artificial, rational, repressed and straight-laced. Bakhtin's thesis of the contest between two diverse outlooks on life and on the body was expressed in the contraposition of two opposing canons, the classicizing canon and the canon of grotesque realism, which gave rise to the notion of a popular, supportive, collective body as opposed to the isolated and self-centred bourgeois individual.

This theorizing of a relatively autonomous popular culture served to stress its capacity both to resist and to fight back, even if this capacity was placed in the overall framework of the triumph of bourgeois modernization. In essaying a synthesis of the results of the new approach to social history, which, in the case of Nalie Zemon Davis,[11] was an investigation of the world of sixteenth-century French artisans and peasants, and, in the case of Christopher Hill, an exploration of the potential subversiveness of seventeenth-century English popular classes,[12] Muchembled provided a radical and rather schematic unifying theme: in the course of four centuries, from the sixteenth to the nineteenth, a cultural revolution had devalued, repressed and finally smothered a typically subaltern-class worldview which was in essence constituted by beliefs, rites and taboos whose purpose was to placate a hostile environment dominated by death, disease, and malign, supernatural forces.[13] In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, this work of destroying popular culture, orchestrated by the ruling classes, became systematic and brought prolonged repression, not only in the form of witch-hunts which targeted 'pagan' residues in popular religiosity,[14] but also in the regulation of private and sexual practices,[15] and in standardizing or abolishing peasant festivities and rituals. The long and victorious war waged by the Counter-Reformation Church and the absolutist state on popular culture was construed as the assertion of the city over the countryside, of reason and science over magic and superstition, and of bourgeois upbringing over the coarse manners of the vulgar.

This basic, simplified dichotomy, neatly described as the triumph of Lent over Carnival (after Pieter Brueghel the Elder's celebrated painting, *The Fight between Carnival and Lent*),[16] gave a rather peculiar image of so-called popular culture: it was represented as being the vector of a subversive capacity to invert roles and to challenge hierarchies, that is, as a sort of class consciousness *in potentia* which supposedly found in rituals the means, the opportunities and the context of values in

which to express itself. Further, under the influence of ideas generated by the youth and student revolt of 1968,[17] this concept of ritual as the bearer of antagonistic values encouraged a festival-centred interpretation of popular revolts in the *ancien régime*,[18] and a reading of uprisings as a form, albeit exceptional, of popular ritual. The carnivalesque reversal of roles,[19] the inversion of traditional rituals and the topsy-turvy world typical of that unique period of time when mad behaviour was allowed, thus became a reservoir of repressed protests awaiting the opportunity to express themselves. For some historians this was seen as the promise of a larger and longer-lasting disruption of the social order while for others, such as Yves-Marie Bercé, it was merely one pole of a physiological dialectic within the *ancien régime* (and elsewhere), a safety valve for outbursts without real subversive intentions which actually served to resolve tensions between rulers and ruled.

In Bercé's writings, the link postulated between festival and revolt became a through-going revision of *ancien régime* popular uprisings. The first part of his interpretation was in line with the arguments advanced by Burke and Muchembled: the peasant community, attacked at the heart of its culture by the sacred fire of Jansenism and by an equally zealous state modernity, resisted the censoring of its festivals and especially of its dances. Seventeenth century is so depicted as the epoch of a sharp contrast between an exuberant practice (traditional and unruly) and the new religion of well-off people, who want to purify themselves excluding all idolatrous beliefs and returning to the true essence of the mythical primitive Church. The customary popular practice, as a consequence, was defined as pagan.[20]

In other words, while, in the Middle Ages, the Church supported and sustained popular culture, with the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, subaltern culture lost part of its vitality, principally through the loss of rituals which embodied and theatricalized community morals, with the result that the audience, which had previously been an active participant, was now reduced to the role of simple spectator.[21]

However, the attack on peasant festivals, and the attempt to replace them with more intimate, restrained and personal rites, encountered popular resistance which found playful expression in the very festivals being challenged. The presence of comic or caricatural scenes at the start of the festival and the frequent use of cross-dressing are a sign, Bercé notes, that a revolt is often thought of as a game which was played during a temporary and legitimate abeyance of authority, and was devoid of any genuinely subversive intention.[22] The person allegedly attacking the community, whether by censoring festivities or by collecting new taxes, was mocked before being attacked, in a festive ritual enabling social tensions to find release: festival/revolt thus allowed the preceding order to be re-established and concluded with a Bacchic celebration marking the flight/expulsion/death of the enemy of the community.[23]

Different lines of interpretation matched diverse theoretical referents. For Muchembled, the dominant category was acculturation, a concept which had originally been used to define processes of cultural change in colonial possessions and which was popularized by Alphonse Dupront.[24] For Burke, the dominant theme was the contraposition, employed by the ethnologist Robert Redfield, between *the*

little tradition and *the great tradition*,[25] that is, the two different traditions which supposedly co-existed in pre-industrial Europe, one belonging to the common people and the other to the élite. However, the relationship between them was not symmetrical: 'the élite participated in the little tradition, but the common people did not participate in the great tradition'.[26]

However, despite such differences, these texts converge in the overall thesis of a progressive dispersion and fragmentation of popular culture in the period between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries because of the attacks to which it was subjected by both the Reformed Churches and the Counter-Reformation, and later by the absolutist state. These texts created a sort of standard version which in the early 1980s underlay the prevalent outlook of historians of popular culture.

2 A thousand Menocchios

Italian historiography engaged in this intellectual debate with its own distinctive interests and characteristics. Shortly after the war, Carlo Levi had proposed, in his widely read and influential novel *Cristo si è fermato ad Eboli* (1945), a view of the world of the southern Italian peasant in terms of their total 'otherness' to the modern world: written as memoirs it was a realistic, first-person account intended to generate solidarity with the marginalized peasants who were then dramatically (and for the first time) entering history.[27] The Fascist cult of popular traditions, abetted from the 1930s by periodicals such as *Lares* and *Il folklore italiano*,[28] was being displaced by a new and quite different attention to the subaltern strata, seen not as mere objects but as subjects of culture.[29] This approach came massively to the fore in the wake of Gramsci's insights in his *Osservazioni sul folklore*, published in *Letteratura e vita nazionale*, which found a thoughtful exegete in Ernesto de Martino.[30] A brief and intense debate ensued within the socialist and communist left (many of the resulting articles on the subject appeared in the periodical *Società*): the focus of the debate was how to elude the Romantic myth of popular culture, how to make the transition to what was then called 'progressive folklore', and how to rethink the nature of popular culture in terms (at least potentially) of class consciousness.[31] At the core of the debate was the ambivalence of a politico-cultural position which aimed to promote the capacity for autonomous expression of the 'instrumental classes' and at the same time to issue a caution against retrograde and oppressive elements (such as the link between popular religion and conservative political orientations) considered to be an integral part of that culture. Apart from some critical voices,[32] it was a purely internal debate within Italian Marxism with strong connotations, ideological, philosophical and, naturally, political: ethnologists and scholars of popular traditions (de Martino, Alberto M. Cirese, Rocco Scotellaro, Gianni Bosio and others) were deeply involved in the debate; to a far lesser extent historians, who were only marginally and, in a sense, retrospectively influenced by it.[33]

However, the work of the leading Italian historian of his generation, Carlo Ginzburg, bears significant traces of this discussion. As he himself recounted, in a fascinating autobiographical essay which has recently been republished,[34] at the

start of his own research he developed an initial hypothesis that witchcraft might be seen as a crude and rudimentary form of class struggle. This initial hypothesis would later be transferred to the arena of intellectual debate, and would be rephrased as a contrast between two opposing cultures. In his *Postscript* (1972) to his first book, *The Night Battles* (1966), Ginzburg explained how his interest in such research had been given clarity 'by reading Gramsci's observations on folklore and on the history of the subaltern classes as well as by Bloch's researches into medieval mentality',[35] and how the target of his thinking was the concept of collective mentality, which he accused of being not only generic but interclassist and, in his opinion, should be supplanted by the concept of two opposing and autonomous classes, in circular communication but also in conflict.

The Friulan archives of the Inquisition gave Ginzburg access to the forgotten voices of peasants: 'the voices of these peasants reach us directly without barriers, not by way, as usually happens, of fragmentary and indirect testimony, filtered through a different and inevitably distorting mentality'. Moreover, they reveal the 'gap between the image underlying the interrogations of the judges and the actual testimony of the accused, [and] enable us to reach a genuinely popular stratum of belief which was later deformed and then expunged by the superimposition of the schema of the educated classes'.[36] In this perspective a decisive importance may be attributed to the growing influence of structuralism and the confidence, engendered by works such as Vladimir Propp's study of Russian folktales,[37] in the validity of a combinatory structural method, an impersonal, dehistoricized solution which gave renewed force to the aspiration of social history to reach the level of objective motivations, if not actual historical laws.

Ginzburg's essay on *Folklore, magia e religione*, which was published in the Einaudi *Storia d'Italia*[38] in the same period as his *Postscript*, gave an overview of what at the time was still called folk culture, which he described as being doubly uprooted: first, because popular agrarian rites had been misconstrued and turned into rites involving demons and witches (under pressure from interrogations and torture, the witches' sabbath had come to be overlaid on a far earlier layer of peasant agrarian beliefs centred on fertility cults); second, folk culture had been subjected to long-lasting repression. The scope was now extended to include, following Bakhtin, the great popular myths analysed by Giuseppe Cocchiara and by Piero Camporesi, in books such as *Il paese di Cuccagna* (The Land of Cockaigne) and *Il mondo alla rovescia* (The World Upside Down),[39] 'grandiose flights of the imagination' of which elements clearly survived in the conception of the sabbath. Bakhtin's mark was evident above all in Ginzburg's updated conclusion which hypothesized that the Carnival, striving for liberation, which could not find expression either through a Church moving towards desacralization, or through the coercive, spurious carnival controlled by those holding power (the 'carnival spirit', so to speak, which one finds at a football match), and which ended by nurturing new forms of popular expression, in art and even in politics, as in the case of *le Mai français*.[40]

In a similar vein, a few years later, in introducing his well-known *The Cheese and the Worms*, Ginzburg indicated his new approach as the investigation of a fragment

of what, post Gramsci, was usually referred to as the culture of the subaltern classes.[41] The protagonist of the enquiry was an obscure Friulan miller, Domenico Scandella, nicknamed Menocchio, who was twice tried by the Inquisition (1585, 1599), and was finally condemned to death for his unorthodox views.[42] As Ginzburg points out, this was a chunk of history which had come down to us by mere chance, a remnant of a culture which had been obliterated by a historically significant act of mutilation:

> Even if Menocchio had been in more or less indirect contact with educated circles, his statements in favour of religious tolerance and his desire for a radical renewal of society have an original stamp to them and do not appear to be the result of passively received outside influences. The roots of his utterances and of his aspirations were sunk in an obscure, almost unfathomable, layer of remote peasant traditions.[43]

Ginsburg, while using, albeit ambiguously, Cirese's idea of 'cultural gaps',[44] resumes his polemic over the possibility of a 'history of mentalities' (and particularly of Lucien Febvre's version), which is taken to task for creating a fictitious and undifferentiated cultural unity. Ginzburg then, the better to define his own position, extends his attack to include both Robert Mandrou and his view of popular culture as the passive acceptance of themes already elaborated by the ruling classes, and against the proposal, advanced in 1970 by Michel de Certeau (along with Dominique Julia and Jacques Revel) in the essay significantly entitled 'La beauté du mort',[45] to consider the making of popular culture as a product of bourgeois false consciousness, as a mythical realm of untouched, pristine, purity which was invented to exorcize the fear of the 'dangerous classes': in a word, popular culture was something that only really existed at the moment when it was suppressed.[46] The assault on what Ginzburg defined as 'nihilistic Foucaultism', which he described as characterized by aestheticizing irrationalism, neopyrrhonism and dubious populism, could not have been blunter. Certainly there was much at stake: the idea of popular culture's ability to safeguard its relative autonomy, within the framework of Bakhtin's hypothesis, which Ginzburg defined as fruitful, and of a reciprocal influence between the culture of the subaltern classes and the dominant culture. Menocchio is presented as an exceptional example of a general situation: of people caught between two cultures.[47]

Problems of definition which had already been encountered with the concept of popular culture[48] also extended to the equally problematic notion of popular religion.[49] Here too the solution proposed by Ginzburg in the late 1970s was consistent:

> on careful analysis, the idea of a timeless and unchanging 'popular religion' proves to be unsustainable, and should be replaced by the more complex notion of a struggle between the religion of the hegemonic classes and religion of the subaltern classes consisting, as do all struggles, of open clashes, of compromises, of imposed periods of peace and skirmishes.[50]

The sabbath itself, which was to be the subject of Ginzburg's most ambitious work, *Storia notturna* (*Night Battles*),[51] was defined as a compromise: 'in the stereotype of the sabbath, I think it is possible to see a "cultural compromise formation", the hybrid result of a conflict between folk culture and learned culture'.[52] *Night Battles* tells the story of a cluster of popular beliefs which, under pressure from the Inquisition, were distorted and ended by being equated with witchcraft itself.

The phenomenon of the sabbath, which arose from the interaction between those accused of witchcraft and their inquisitors, thus bears the traces of an age-old circulation of ecstatic myths and rites which originated in the steppes of Asia, as well as marks of the transposition and reformulation carried out by the judges who were repressing these myths and rites: the judges translated beliefs which were substantially extraneous to their own culture into a different code, in a way not dissimilar to the dialogue (in Bakhtin's sense of an unresolved clash between conflicting voices) between anthropologist and native.

This theses aroused considerable attention and favourable judgements but also a series of vigorously critical responses. As early as 1967, in his review of *Night Battles* Alberto Tenenti stigmatized the book for its use of generic and imprecise terms, which disembodied and rendered abstract the actual trial, and for the selection of documentary *exempla*, which unfailingly served to confirm the propositions being advanced.[53] Tenenti particularly questioned the contraposition between the worldview of the inquisitorial judges and that of the supposed witches:

> although we imagine them as seated on opposite benches, inquisitors and *benandanti* are part of a single, vast world of beliefs. All of them act and express themselves in keeping with their own specific interests and with their own level of culture. The conflict setting them against each other only makes sense within common points of reference and common beliefs, and within a framework of a fairly homogeneous, magical and religious heritage. One is not to imagine that tiny bands of *sorciers* had the misfortune to appear before well-versed doctrinaires who did not understand them.[54]

He added that witchcraft and theology long enjoyed a symbiotic relationship and fought on the same terrain: hence it would be wrong to believe in the rationality, homogeneity and cohesiveness of the demonological guidelines of official culture, and to consider them in isolation from demonology, which was a practice rooted in all cultural levels of society. What actually does emerge is an intense exchange of elements involving liturgy, the devil and even paganism.

The interpretation of Menocchio's cultural universe as centred on the resurfacing of a folk substrate was also subjected to criticisms: Paola Zambelli sees the resumption of the subject of spontaneous generation not as the re-emergence of a centuries-old cosmogonic tradition but as the specific literary influence of classical and medieval authors, such as Ovid and Honorius, who came to Menocchio's knowledge through the mediation of heterodox, Paduan Aristotelians,[55] whereas Giorgio Spini detected in Menocchio's naturalistic worldview echoes of a cultural

current springing from Averroism and leading, via Petro Pomponazzi and Gerolamo Cardano, to the theses of the libertines and of Giulio Cesare Vanini.[56] In fact Menocchio, as Spini points out, travelled, taught children to read, bought or borrowed books, and styled himself as philosopher, astrologer, and prophet. While there is no evidence that he believed in matters typical of the peasant culture of his time, such as spells, terrestrial wanderings of the souls of the dead, miraculous madonnas and saints who battle demons, his ideas definitely were not shared by most of those living in the same region.[57]

3 The hermeneutical turn

It was in this same period, the early 1980s, at a time when a broadly accepted historiographical approach to popular culture seemed to have achieved a certain consistency, that, at a conference held at Cornell University in 1982 (the proceedings of which were published in 1984),[58] there got underway the work of deconstructing the notion of popular culture which was beginning to seem insufficiently thought thorough, and 'to be clouded by conceptual uncertainties'. Steven Kaplan's brief preface read as a list of the doubts emerging about the notion's practical validity. Are binary formulations such as high/low and learned/unlearned compelling? Does the frontier between high and low remain an analytically useful line of demarcation? Is it sufficient to define 'popular' in terms of the artefacts in which the quality is supposed to inhere – in a given body of texts, values, modes of behaviour? Or is an approach that stresses the diffusion of these cultural objects through their societies better suited to locating and labelling the 'popular'? Might it not be more illuminating to shift our emphasis away from the objects themselves and their dissemination, to the diverse ways in which, by accident and by design, they are perceived, used and transformed?[59] The conclusion of many of the contributors was to indicate the elusiveness of a much-used and little-explored category. However, in the meantime, Stuart Clark, writing in *Past and Present*, issued, from the standpoint of a 'linguistic view of agency and meaning', what may be considered a formal charge laid against the then current use in France of the idea of popular culture: this was accused of being anachronistic and reductionist.[60] Clark took as an example Muchembled's reconstruction and traced its roots to an *Annales* tradition which relied on Fernand Braudel's idea of *longue durée*. He attacked all reconstructions of peasant communities which described them as victims of a mistaken view of the world, and of incorrect and ineffectual practices, that is, he attacked all narratives which recounted the story of a rural world in isolation from how its actors conceived this world and lived in it. The question which he raised – whether it is legitimate to attribute a sociologically privileged, external observer with the ability to understand local ways of life (such as rituals), when such supposed ability was actually disconnected from the meaning which the actors provide of that experience, merely by the observer's invocation of an authority 'higher than discourse' – was openly rhetorical and clearly indicated the change in perspective already taking place in historical studies.[61]

In the same vein was Jean Wirth's critique of the notion of acculturation. As he pointed out, this notion presupposed an implicit belief in two diverse mental structures, one of which was defined as primitive.[62] The so-called history of mentalities was vitiated by this same presupposition, which may be traced back to Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, and which was subsequently appropriated from the study of non-European societies to medieval and early modern European societies. Wirth argued that the notion of acculturation presupposed a contraposition between the large majority of the population, designated as backward, and an educated élite, deemed literate, dynamic and rational; backwardness manifested itself in a lack of initiative, in a recurrent difficulty in adapting to the new, and in taking refuge in inherited practices resistant to social change. Hence, the acculturation thesis presupposed that 'primitives', who are alive and in our midst, are waiting, so to speak, for someone to help them evolve and achieve the desired rationality which, he observed, may more or less be identified with the historian's ideology.

A dramatic example of the distortions generated by this view may be seen in the way that Muchembled interpreted early modern iconoclastic movements and found in them the beginning of the process of the destruction by the ruling classes of the traditional fabric of popular culture. Wirth observed that those involved in the iconoclastic movement cannot be fitted into this scheme. If the crowds attacking images and relics are not made up of members of the élites, in turn the rhetorical register of preachers with a broad popular audience, such as Thomas Conecte or Girolamo Savonarola, was often directed against the moral failings of the ruling classes; hence the framework which determines its understanding (and perhaps even the physical fate of its exponents) does not pit bookish culture against popular culture but, more realistically, sets orthodoxy against heresy.[63]

The positions adopted by Clark and Wirth were followed by Dominick La Capra's savage critique of Ginzburg, entitled *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Twentieth-Century Historian*.[64] La Capra considered *The Cheese and the Worms* one of the most significant contributions to the flourishing field of studies in popular history, but also as a text exemplifying not so much the intellectual world of a sixteenth-century miller as that of a twentieth-century historian, and hence emblematic of the premises and pitfalls of the historical trends then in vogue. La Capra stressed Bakhtin's powerful influence on Ginzburg's conception of popular culture which, if not entirely autonomous, is considered primordial or fundamental: Ginzburg presents peasant or folk culture as essentially a pre-Christian phenomenon which the upheavals of the Reformation, by shattering the shell of unified Christian belief, brought to light and thus enabled the re-emergence of a substrate of old beliefs, whereas the Counter-Reformation, in its attempt to restore fractured unity, strove to bring the old beliefs into the light the better to sweep them away.[65] Menocchio's radicalism would thus be explained as an expression of an autonomous current of peasant radicalism which the upheavals of the Reformation served to bring to the surface, but which actually went much further back in time.

For La Capra, these were a series of unproven theses, and it was Ginzburg's own metaphors rather than Menocchio's strikingly vivid ones which needed to be explained and understood, such as the metaphysical opposition between oral culture

(vibrant and expressed through shouts and gestures) and written culture (toneless, crystallized and expressing power). In fact, Menocchio read passionately and meditated, especially on the Bible, and the Bible cannot be considered the expression of an atavistic, folk, cultural substrate. Moreover, the culture of the popular strata, far from being all of a piece and homogeneous, had, just as did the so-called dominant culture, its internal differences and its deep divisions. Materialism, egalitarianism, religious tolerance and utopianism, all of which can be discerned in Menocchio's worldview, were not hegemonic even in Montereale, Menocchio's hometown, given that many of his fellow inhabitants (not to mention those in the great world outside) had completely different ideas.

The long review of *Night Battles* by Perry Anderson approached matters from a different angle, but was equally blunt in rejecting the hypothesis of a metahistoric popular culture.[66] For Anderson, who critically scrutinized the way in which the author reinterpreted the stucturalist methodology developed by Claude Lévi-Strauss and by Vladimir J. Propp, Ginzburg was an unwitting victim of the hypothesis of a Eurasian mythology based on shamanism, an idea popular among Russian émigrés between the wars, which should be considered an Orientalizing version of traditional Slavophilia.[67] However, and more importantly, the persistence of motifs of shamanic origin, Anderson pointed out, was no guarantee of the continuity of their meaningfulness. In different cultural contexts, the same cultural practice or belief as, for example, an ecstatic experience, suffers an erosion of meaning and a desemantization, changes its role, and even acquires new meanings. As with words, so also with the elements of a myth, age itself is no guarantee of meaningfulness and, in fact, some cultural themes survive only when they have lost their centrality and it is such banalization which confers on them an otherwise impossible continuity.

In Anderson's view, Ginzburg's own tenacity and single-mindedness did not depend on objective reasons but on Ginzburg's own profound convictions: as Ginzburg himself acknowledged, an ideological orientation is often the precondition for a historian's work, even if clearly it may also vitiate its results. Anderson was here referring to Georges Dumézil, in whose works on comparative mythology one can find a cultural milieu receptive to Nazism, and to Mircea Eliade, whose *Myth of the Eternal Return* came into being in a Romania marked by the defeat of the Iron Guard. In Ginzburg's case as well, one may speak of an original ideal of socialist-populist inspiration which was never repudiated.[68]

So, in the early 1990s, the concept of popular culture, in the sense of folk culture, was disaggregated despite some attempts to relaunch it by giving it a different orientation.[69] Those who drew the consequences of this situation were the anthropologists, who adopted a critical and self-reflective posture which historians for the most part shirked.[70]

4 Folklore and reflexive anthropology

In the 1980s the concept of popular culture came under radical scrutiny also in the field of demology.[71] The Italian case is again intriguing. The phase of critical

rethinking of the notion of popular culture may be dated from Pietro Clemente's distancing himself from Bakhtin's view of the Carnival.[72] Taking his cue from a full-page article in *Lotta continua* which aimed, in a politically polemical perspective, to rescue the joyful and festive elements typical of Carnival,[73] Clemente gave a detailed analysis of what he claimed was 'the most ideologized festive circle' and of the prevailing interpretation of Carnival dominated by Bakhtin's views, which he described as 'a carnival which is not false and yet not true, as one might say speaking of a work of art or a novel but as one does not usually say about a document'.[74] In contraposition to Carnival as interpreted through the ideas of Bakhtin or George Frazer, he places the Carnival as seen by anthropologists such as Arnold Van Gennep and Julio Caro Baroja, and endorses their critique of the supposed continuity between the Saturnalia and the Carnival and their broader critique of the so-called Frazer-style 'vegetable anthropology'.[75] When Carnival is returned to its place in a Christian rather than in a pagan tradition, then it is seen not as opposed but intimately linked to Lent, not as the embodiment of a distinct, almost metaphysical, 'spirit', but as a complex of festive acts linked to a specific period in the liturgical calendar.

It was along these lines that anthropological studies, as did the vast and rather amorphous field of folklore studies, gradually distanced themselves from the concept of popular culture, whose use now appeared ever more problematic.[76] Simultaneously there was began the massive penetration of Clifford Geertz's interpretative anthropology, with its critique of what he called the divisionist concept of culture elaborated by nineteenth-century anthropology and ethnology; that is, the preference for isolated and self-contained contexts, which are genuine islands of culture, as opposed to more realistic situations where everything is variegated, permeable, intermixed and dispersed: in short, a world more like a Kuwaiti bazaar than an English gentlemen's club.[77]

To this must be added both a widespread sensitivity for the political context of the production of knowledge, propitiated by a relaunching in the USA of Foucault's ideas, mediated by Derrida, and the consequent diffidence towards the presumed innocence with which anthropologists (or historians) and inquisitors create their own documentary materials and confer on them false objectivity.[78] This was a critical and reflexive approach which, combined with an attention to the rhetorical form and literary nature of anthropological (or historical) writing, were distinctive features of the so-called postmodern cultural climate. A good example of this change was Michael Herzfeld's work, a sort of total re-thinking of the field of popular culture, first with his stimulating research into the relationship between folklore and the making of the modern Greek state,[79] and subsequently with a series of essays on the practice of anthropology.

In Italy it was again Pietro Clemente who enlivened the discussion and later summarized his conclusions in a collection of demological studies, significantly entitled *Oltre il folklore* (Beyond Folklore): his conclusion was that it had become difficult, if not impossible, 'to continue researching the "usual objects" in the "usual" places and with the customary methods'. His anthology examined the themes and writings of the 1980s and 1990s which he saw as signalling the

gradual abandonment by European ethnology of the traditional demological framework.

The first among these was the relationship of the folkloric tradition with the conceptual duality of permanence/variation. Rudolf Schenda, in opposition to the traditionally accepted view, which saw permanence as the typical feature of an element of popular culture, maintained that it was actually its traits of adaptability and malleability which ensured its survival: the seemingly paradoxical conclusion was that a folklore phenomenon existed according to its variability and not according to its unchanging nature. The focus moved from 'essences' to modifications, versions and transferences, that is, to metamorphoses which indicate folklore as something 'bent over time to any purpose, available to all ideologies and, like a *paysanne pervertie*, moved to the city just as she is about to turn into a prostitute'.[80]

The second theme, which was put forward by Richard Bauman, was that of superseding the concept of folklore as something abstract and super organic, regulated by impersonal laws and processes, and of seeing it contextually in relation to individuals, and cultural and social factors which give it form, meaning and being: 'Symbolic and expressive forms relating to folklore live primarily in the actions of people and are rooted in their social and cultural life.'[81] Moreover, this is the sole terrain where one can reclaim a discourse which is common to the methods and aims of a field of enquiry, *cultural studies*, which includes oral history and the study of present-day marginal and subaltern groups.[82] As has been well observed, after the 1960s the debate on popular culture suffered shipwreck on the shoals of mass culture.[83]

Perhaps it was Gérard Lenclud's thoughts on tradition which most deeply subverted the generally accepted idea of folklore, which saw tradition as the persistence of the past in the new, symbolized as an old object sliding from the past towards the present. Hence, the task of ethnology would be to assemble elements from the past which are still visible in the present, at which time they are defined as a heritage. However, by applying even a modicum of critical analysis, it becomes clear that not everything from the past is usually judged to be part of a tradition, but only what is considered significant: in other words, a tradition is always the result of *selection* and indeed may be defined as a *selective* cultural depository.

This viewpoint radically calls into question the concept of tradition as preservation from change, and as a stabilizing process which is virtually predestined to serve the purposes of collecting and of future knowledge: as if people in the present passively receive from the past a truth which has already been established, and which is then repeated in a stereotyped way. Instead, tradition, rather than being thought of as a heritage from the past, should rather be considered as an interpretation of past time, as a point of view, developed by people in the present about what preceded them. Hence tradition is retrospection, a bearing of witness, and a rhetoric of what is presumed to have been, which provides the present with a guarantee of what it itself is: 'Tradition is inverse filiation. It is not fathers who engender sons but sons who engender their own fathers. It is not the past which produces the present but the present which shapes the past. Tradition is a process of acknowledging paternity.'[84]

More recently these thoughts were accompanied by Pietro Clemente's refreshingly frank autobiographical reflections on his work as an anthropologist. In evoking the pioneering spirit of the 1950s and 1960s and his demological work on the culture of Tuscan share-farmers Pietro Clemente fairly recently restated the reasons which then induced him to exclude more modern social groups, especially workers, from his anthropological research, and to limit his enquiry to 'the archaic which survived and which sought to reread its fate, to the epic of the peasant classes, to a world which was being swept away' in its confrontation with contemporary reality, seen as 'spurious, diabolical, consumerist, lost, impure'.[85] It was, he writes,

> subordination to a simplifying model which structured the nexus of politics, culture and society; in this model the working class was the object of a sort of religion which could only be interpreted and given liturgical form by the Communist Party. We were all devoted to the working class and so, in varying degrees, devoted to the party which regulated its worship, whether this was recognized as legitimate or illegitimate and blasphemous (there were some who were struggling to create a purer party).[86]

Even if the working class belonged to history and politics, it was nevertheless projected into an eschatological dimension: 'And so, if a worker loved his car, ignored his children, and wanted more football and less culture, then he was not a real worker but merely reflected an extraneous hegemony.'[87]

The consequences for anthropological enquiry, as seen in retrospect, led Clemente to a critical assessment of his own research:

> I personally undertook this research into the culture of peasant share-farmers in Tuscany and particularly in the province of Siena, and into ritual and devotional practices, into orality and writing by the people. I think that the research was not useless, it was critical, philologically based, contextual and also full of new approaches to anthropology. But I lost sight of those share-farmers who were attracted by modernity, who were fleeing from the land, who were buying cars, tractors, harvesters which did the job of forty manual workers, freezers and motorized hedge clippers, who organized Communist fund-raisers and *porchetta, fungo porcino* and duck festivals: their children and grandchildren went on to university and knew nothing about their parents' and grandparents' lives.[88]

Fabio Dei expressed himself in not dissimilar terms in evoking a later period, the middle of the 1970s: at that time 'people were studying Gramsci and also de Martino on southern Italian questions, Cirese's internal cultural gaps and his manual, progressive folklore, the engaged intellectual, the concept of culture and the anthropological dimension of work'. The appeal of popular culture came not only from the attraction of its political connotation, which was a putative class consciousness vectoring revolutionary values opposed to bourgeois order, but also from the quest

for a pure and authentic anthropological truth profoundly antagonistic to the artificiality of mass culture, and to the invasion of the products of the cultural industry. Paradoxically, adherence to the poetics of popular culture, impregnated as it was with the ideas of the Frankfurt School, was a choice which was 'exclusive and élitist in the extreme', despite the fact that some researchers, children of peasants, found themselves in the ambiguous situation of being what is nowadays called 'native anthropologists': 'we had grown up in a social fabric and we laboriously tried to get rid of this legacy and used plastic jerry cans instead of copper containers, television rather than folk tales, antibiotics and not spells, and Yale padlocks rather than fennel'. As for the crucial question of why we chose peasant ethnography over research into the actual working life of the working class, the answer nowadays is different: 'we thought then that the workers' background was one of exploitation, not of culture'.[89]

This arduous process of freeing oneself from the shackles of pervasive ideological models could have taken place in another, and quicker, way if attention had been paid to the scholar who better than others was able to come to grips with the legacy of Romantic cultural primitivism as it had crystallized in the period between the wars: I refer to Hermann Bausinger and his *Folk Culture in a World of Technology*.[90] The book, published in 1961, is an examination of the notion of the 'naturalness' of popular culture, understood as the ideal-typical pole opposed to the 'artificial' pole of technical culture, which was itself the very symbol of modernity. Bausinger's account of how popular culture was firmly entrenched in premodern – and thoroughly antimodern – forms and contents may be considered the most penetrating and most destructive critique of an entire intellectual tradition which, with its roots in Romantic culture, found considerable cultural resonance under Nazism through its support of the regime's racist worldview. Bausinger, from his position as director, after 1937, of the *Institut für Deutsche Volkskunde* (Institute for German Demology) gave his critical (and self-critical) thoughts on the attraction exerted on folkloric studies by surviving superstitions and by the interpretation of popular culture as the 'maternal space' of national culture. He himself advocated that attention should instead be given to studying changing plebeian cultures and mass culture: in this his thinking predated and prefigured trends typifying the more recent field of *cultural studies*. In Bausinger's view, concentration needed to be shifted from a rigid focus on atavistic traditions to describing their transformation in the modern world.

At the risk of simplifying Bausinger's viewpoint, one may summarize it with three, seemingly counter-intuitive, propositions, all directed at challenging dualistic interpretative approaches. The first aimed to dismantle the contraposition of 'popular' and 'technical', where the former stands for the organic and non-historical realm 'still governed by unchanging traditional order and custom', where a connection is still felt to exist between human feelings and surrounding nature, where the past is not disrupted by the present, whereas the 'technical world' indicates an organized, profoundly historical place where 'greed and the screeching of machinery disturb all other thoughts'. The result is a twofold problematization of the relationship between 'traditional' and 'modern'.

In this perspective, the salvaging of the popular aspect is actually a way of 'fossilizing requisites',[91] and of immobilizing forms and practices which the modern needs in order to think about itself. The prelogical and instinctive man of the people is a function of the technical rationality which needs to be accentuated. Rather than looking at technology as a factor destructive of cultural purity, Bausinger observes, we should study the cultural changes produced by the adoption and use of technology by popular strata, and investigate the shifts in meaning and the blending of magic-religious and technical forms. In short, Carnival is inseparable and of a piece with its 'machines'.

The second proposition asserted the falsehood of the contraposition between popular culture and fashion. The latter, like the former, is a way of creating, and often re-inventing, the past. Many customs, considered to be solid and well-structured, are merely the result of an optical illusion produced by looking back in time. In the concept of tradition, in 'turning back to the good old days', the historical aspect is put on hold, whereas, on closer inspection, the past, just like the present, is a place sedimented with salvaged and jettisoned material, with recoveries and re-inventions. Contrasting the image of the 'old town' as a real image means stressing the importance of the exotic, of objects, of linguistic idioms, of recipes and, in general, of the realm of the 'far, far away' in the culture of popular strata.

Thirdly, Bausinger was issuing an invitation to jettison a perspective which would separate the discourses of observers (folkloric discourse) and the discourses of the observed (folkloric material), and on this subject he referred to something akin to a 'Heisenberg principle' at work in social sciences.[92] The concept according to which the historically anterior makes up the non-historic, that is, over the centuries nature has become the heritage also of less educated social groups, with the result that the culture of subaltern strata in the modern period (that is, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries) was undoubtedly shaped by 'scholarly' study of the people and their culture.

5 Inventing the people

These concepts of Bausinger, despite being formulated almost 50 years ago, still offer considerable food for thought: his rethinking not only stimulates a necessary clarification of the ideological underpinning and of the preconceptions which for long oriented research,[93] but also stimulates a new and diverse awareness of cultural multiplicity and of its differentiation both 'by areas' (as is made clear by the proposal to replace the term 'popular religion' with that of 'local religion'),[94] and 'by segments' of cultures; new attention was also given to their constant intermingling and cross grafting.

In keeping with this line, it has recently been maintained that categories such as 'superstition' which were very significant in creating the concept of a folklore tradition (and in the actual birth of the word folklore, which was coined by William John Thorns in 1846,[95] – the term previously used was *popular antiquities*[96]) had their roots in the reformed anti-papist attack on the Catholic oral tradition and on the

supposedly pagan roots of its worship, a field of controversy which was fundamental, as were antiquarian studies, in preserving for posterity beliefs and practices which met with visceral disapproval.[97] Heir to anti-Catholic polemics, the distorting paradigm of survivalism was seen as pagan and papist, long defined as relics (also in the sense of remains), and hence superstitious, those ideas which first the Reformation and then the free press strove to do away with. If historians are rather reluctant or slow to discard these definitions it is perhaps because, as has been pointed out, they inherited much of the same discursive tradition which had established them. This tardiness in acknowledging and in exposing the shackles of a constraining vocabulary, and its implications, necessarily raise the question of the degree of dependence of a cultural tradition on the construction or invention of the people. This requires a brief investigation.

As has been mentioned, as early as 1970 Michel de Certeau, Dominique Julia and Jacques Revel, in their analyses of the construction of discourse on popular culture, had indicated an indispensable premise for approaching the subject. In France there had been from the very start what they called an infatuation (*engouement*) with anything to do with the people, especially if they were peasants: it was a form of rusticophilia. The French peasant, the *sauvage de l'intérieur*, became a symbol of the virtues which were best preserved in the least accessible places, in the pristine, unspoilt purity of the countryside. However, this strand of attraction and idealization was accompanied by another strand: the need to keep the rustics in their place and under control, as was shown by the famous enquiry carried out by the Abbé Grégoire in 1790, *Sur la necessité et le moyens d'anéantir les patois et d'universaliser l'usage de la langue française*. Grégoire saw the elimination of dialects as a necessary stage in the more general minimization of local differences which were seen as residues of the abhorred feudal world. Similarly, the first book in French on popular literature, Charles Nisard's *Histoire des livres populaires* (1854), came about from the author's work on the censorship board, which was set up by police authorities after 1848 to monitor trade union and early socialist agitation; as the authors of 'La beauté du mort' comment, it was a kind of castrating cult which was kindly bestowed on the people just as they were beginning to be considered as an object of study.

For his part, Burke, in the first chapter of his book on popular culture, produced a close examination of the process which led, in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century culture, to the creation of the category of the people as an object of study: if Burke's rethinking of this much-studied theme had been developed more coherently, it would have enabled a different approach to his central contention of the presence in *ancien régime* Europe of a popular culture which was progressively threatened and later disaggregated by the emergence of modern culture. Burke wrote that in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the 'people' and 'folklore' became a topic of interest for European intellectuals (especially because of the influence of Rousseau's *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, 1761): 'craftsmen and peasants were no doubt surprised to find their homes invaded by men and women with middle-class clothes and accents who insisted they sing traditional songs or tell traditional stories'.[98]

We know that early Romanticism held that the sensibility of the people was principally expressed through song and poetry. In Herder's view, poetry had once possessed a force which had been lost: poetry had been the best expression of what would later be called the 'organic community', that is, a synthesis of the values of so-called savage peoples, whom Herder considered more moral than the peoples who were his contemporaries; thus Moses, Homer and the Minnesingers were all, in the same way, 'singers of the people'. For the Brothers Grimm the non-authorial, widespread, oral nature of tradition was the best guarantee that it was a collective creation of the nation;[99] particularly for Jakob Grimm, it was to be expected that a national epic, such as the *Nibelungenlied*, should be by an unknown author 'because such epics belong to the people as a whole': it is the people who create, *das Volk dichtet*. This was the origin of the fundamental distinction between popular and educated culture, between *Kultur des Volkes* and *Kultur des Gelehrten*.[100] Concomitant with this was Achim von Arnim's notion that the songs of the people contained the soul of a disunited people or, as they are called in Manzoni's *Adelchi*, 'the scattered throng without a name'.

Burke gives a brilliant summary of the outpouring of poems, ballads, sagas and popular tales engendered by the success of Ossianism, and writes engagingly of episodes such as Samuel Johnson and James Boswell's emblematic tour which took them to the far-off Hebrides, west of Scotland, in search of the primitive customs of people who did not speak English and who wore the tartan, a journey famously recounted in *A Tour to the Hebrides*. When they arrived in Anchanasheal, Boswell noted that the locals 'looked as swart and savage as American Indians', and in Glenmorison this attitude of the two travellers caused their host consternation and perhaps offence as his pride 'seemed to be much piqued that we were surprised at his having books'.[101]

This cultural primitivism,[102] in which the old, the remote and the popular ended up by being identified and even confounded, was also the breeding ground of Romantic nationalism in its various guises: German, anti-French Spanish, anti-Austrian Italian, anti-Turk Greek, and so on. For the success of this process, by which an abstract concept such as 'the people as nation' became focused in the popular strata, deemed to be the depositories of the 'heart' of the national tradition, it was necessary to take account of a twofold process which was gaining in strength and which consisted both of 'identification' and 'distancing'.

Identification occurred through 'intimate encounters' by which old texts, which were hard to read and basically rebarbative, were 'made familiar': the Brothers Grimm collected their Hessian stories in dialect, and made them into a masterpiece of German literature by expurgating some stories, by homogenizing others, and by introducing catchphrases such as *Es war einmal* ('once upon a time') and *Und sie lebten glücklich bis an ihr Ende* ('they lived happily ever after'). At the time such minor changes were not considered inappropriate. Elias Lönnrot, the inventor of the Finnish epic *Kalevala*, justified his own procedure in this way: 'Finally, when no rune-singer could any longer compare with me in his knowledge of songs, I assumed that I had the same right which, in my opinion, most of the other singers

freely reserved to themselves, namely the right to arrange the songs according as they seemed to fit best.'[103] The difference between an out-and-out forgery such as James Macpherson's *Ossian*[104] and the work of most editors of ballads and early poetry, from Percy to Scott and the Brothers Grimm, turned out to be more a matter of degree than of substance, and was an operation akin to the restoration of Gothic churches which was being undertaken in the same period where it is no longer possible to distinguish what is original and what is the work of the restorer.[105]

In music, too, significant embellishments were made: the rediscovery of early folk music was accompanied by the addition of chords and new harmonic accompaniments which aimed to satisfy the taste of the time. As well as music, the process of re-inventing tradition extended to resurrecting earlier festivals which had fallen into disuse, such as the Cologne Carnival in 1823, the Nuremberg Carnival in 1843 and the Carnival of Nice shortly after; the eisteddfod, the famous Welsh festival of music, dance and literature, was brought back to life in the late eighteenth century as part of the Druid revival and was staged in Camarthen in 1819 (the costumes were designed later in the nineteenth century).[106]

If by this process of 'intimate encounters' and 'familiarization' it was possible to create a highly typified and idealized image of the people as a collective organic being, cohesive, natural, simple, uneducated, instinctive, rooted in tradition and in their homeland,[107] just as important was the simultaneous process of 'distancing' the concrete actions of the people which the mobilization of the masses, like the opening of Pandora's box, had unleashed all over Europe. If Lessing already made a distinction between songs of the people and songs of the vulgar, Herder thought that the people should be identified with the lower social level, which included women, children and peasants, that is, those who had been left on the margins of corrupting *civilization* and were quite distinct from the street rabble (*Pöbel*) who are the populace which does not sing and does not create but screams and destroys. And so the 'sound' traditional part of the people was distinguished from the 'corrupt' part which had been contaminated, so to speak, by civilization.

This Herderian and Rousseauian outlook is to be found again in a historian who admired both of them and, more than anyone, contributed to the idealization of the people: surprisingly he was ignored both by Burke and the authors of 'La beauté du mort'. I refer to Jules Michelet. It was he who guided the transition from the concept of people-nation to the concept of the people as vector of the social revolution; both concepts derived from the dichotomy of the oppressed and the oppressors which the theme of conquest, as developed by Augustine Thierry (and reproposed in a different form by François Guizot), had imposed on the European cultural scene. In Michelet, following Herder, the excluded, the marginalized, the simple folk are exemplary bearers of the virtues of the people: it was not by chance that it was a hymn of praise to peasants which filled the first chapter of *Le peuple* (1846).[108]

The urban populace, as depicted in Romantic literature and *feuilletons*, was the innocent victim of physical and at times moral degeneration,[109] inflicted on them by unhealthy living conditions and lifestyles; however, the values and examples to emulate and which best expressed the unity of the people, which was not amenable

to social differences and hierarchies, were to be sought in the countryside. Or else among women and children, who were better sheltered from the perverse fascination of the bourgeois *beaux esprits*, from the *cabaret* and its vices, from the usurious, 'Jewish' temptation of the pursuit of money for its own sake. In Michelet there was an ideal of simplicity and purity, an enthusiasm for the strength and beauty of the soul of the people, which was revealed not only by their diffidence towards the abstract rationalization of working life (the machine age) and politics (*la philosophie de l'Etat*) but, above all by his aversion to *mélanges*, to hybrid forms, to those elements of the people which were 'mixed and semi-educated' and which shared the good and bad qualities of the bourgeois classes, bastardized beings without a future. When all is said and done, *le mulet est stérile*.[110]

6 Conclusions: rethinking the concept of popular

Popular culture, in the sense of folk culture, not mass culture, was more than a fantasy of intellectuals.[111] It was the concept which made it possible to characterize the figure of the people in the decisive transitional period when it became the mythical foundation of national identity and revolutionary subjectivity. To study the people means to identify their traits and tendencies, to rediscover their traditions and customs, to investigate in depth their essence. To study popular culture in this sense, far from being an epiphenomenon, an activity nurtured by curiosity and even pleasure but basically secondary, is in fact consubstantial with its object and hence closely linked to the mythopoetic core of the grand narratives of nation and class. Both by the attraction or the repulsion of the subject, or, as it has been expressed, by identifying with it or by distancing oneself from it, the discourse on popular culture has enabled the articulation of perspectives on identity and difference, on what typifies us and what typifies those 'other than us'. Debate on the subject was also the idealized scenario, the backdrop, against which it was possible to delineate more clearly the troubled drama of modernity. In a time like ours, in which we talk of the postmodernist elimination of the distinction between 'popular' and 'highbrow' culture (and also between 'commercial' and 'genuine' culture, and a culture of 'creation' and a culture of 'allusion'), and in which we debate the 'culturization' or 'aestheticization' of everyday life, it may prove easier to tackle the question of popular culture and to free it from the models and worldviews which it contributed to establishing, and of which we are often the unwitting heirs. For historians, this inevitably means acknowledging our debt to an intellectual legacy, which is all the more pervasive and persistent for being implicit and taken for granted: historiography should follow the lead given by anthropology, and nourish its propensity for critical self-reflection.

Notes

1 Le Goff long maintained the intellectual validity of this perspective of two contrasting cultures: see *Pour un autre Moyen Age. Temps, travail et culture en occident: 18 essais*, Paris:

Gallimard, 1977, p. 14. See also E. Patlagean, 'Histoire de l'imaginaire', in J. Le Goff, R. Chartier and J. Revel (eds), *La nouvelle histoire*, Paris: CEPL, 1978, p. 255.

2 For Jean-Claude Schmitt, see especially his *Religione, folklore e società nell'Occidente medievale*, Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1988, in which, seeking to defend himself from the notion that he had maintained the existence of two separate cultures, he relaunched the idea of the two-directional nature of influences, and resumed Cirese's concept of 'cultural gaps'.

3 A. J. Gurevič, *Contadini e santi. Problemi della cultura popolare nel Medioevo*, Turin: Einaudi, 1981.

4 P. Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*, Aldershot: Wildwood House, 1988 (1st edn 1978).

5 R. Muchembled, *Popular Culture and Elite Culture in France, 1400–1750*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1985 (1st edn 1978).

6 P. Camporesi, 'Cultura popolare e cultura d'elite fra medioevo ed età moderna', in C. Vivanti (ed.), *Intellettuali e potere*, IV vol. of *Annali della Storia d'Italia*, Turin: Einaudi, 1981, pp. 81–157.

7 Y.-M. Bercé, *Fête et révolte. Des mentalités populaires du XVIe au XVIIIe siècle. Essai*, Paris: Hachette, 1976.

8 Burke, *Popular Culture*, p. 24.

9 M. Bakhtine (Mikhail Bakhtin), *L'oeuvre de François Rabelais et la culture populaire au Moyen Age et sous la Renaissance*, Paris: Gallimard, 1970. See also, Tzvetan Todorov's influential interpretation of Bakhtin's work, *Michail Bachtin. Il metodo dialogico*, Turin: Einaudi, 1990 (1st edn 1981).

10 A. Momigliano, 'Linee per una valutazione della storiografia nel quindicennio 1961–1976', *Rivista Storica Italiana*, LXXXIX (1977), fasc. III–IV, pp. 596–608.

11 N. Zemon Davis, 'Some Tasks and Themes in the Study of Popular Religion', in C. Trinkaus and H. A. Oberman (eds), *The Pursuit of Holiness in Late Medieval and Renaissance Religion*, Leiden: Brill, 1974; Zemon Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France: Eight Essays*, London: Duckworth, 1975.

12 C. Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas during the English Revolution*, London: Temple Smith, 1972.

13 See, however, Roger Cartier's review of Muchembled's book in *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine*, XXVII (April–June 1979), pp. 298–300.

14 Muchembled seemed aware in this case of having placed undue strain on his dating, as the period of the greatest activity against the practice of witchcraft coincided with the supposed golden age of popular culture, from the beginning of the fifteenth century to the middle of the sixteenth century.

15 This orientation would later become important as a background to the renewed interest in Norbert Elias after his death, and to the formulation of the category of 'disciplining'. G. Alessi, 'Discipline. I nuovi orizzonti del disciplinamento sociale', *Storica*, II/4, 1996, pp. 7–38.

16 At the conclusion of his trajectory over these years as a researcher, in which he straddled the fields of anthropology and history, Piero Camporesi wrote that

> the victory of Lent, the ultimate defeat of Carnival, the rise of a capitalistic ethic and of a new attitude to money, the fateful emergence of new ideologies and of a different organization of work, modified and narrowed human, cultural, and existential spaces. However, they also helped to heighten the painful relationship between contemporary people and the past which was based on an awareness of a time which was over and could not be repeated, and on the bitter sense of the irreparable and irreversible entropy between past and present.
>
> *(Rustici e buffoni, Cultura popolare e cultura d'elite tra Medio evo ed età moderna,* Turin: Einaudi, 1991, p. 55*)*

17 In his afterword to the Italian edition of his book (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1991), Muchembled denied that he had been influenced by Marxism, to which he did not

subscribe at the time (1978), and certainly not by Gramsci, with whom he was unfamiliar: he stated that his book instead showed the influence of the intellectual climate typical of the years of disillusionment following the events of May 1968: 'I confess that the upheaval of 1968 left a mark on my approach and gave a lasting orientation to my interests' (p. 9); he observes that, under the oppressive weight of Gaullism, there was very much alive a spirit of insubordination which was linked with nostalgia for a lost rural world 'when raising goats deep in the country seemed a way of recovering lost purity'; although the book needed to be partially rewritten and the theory of acculturation needed to be more nuanced, he states that the general thesis shaping it needed to be adhered to: 'A slow but brutal cultural revolution extirpated the vision of a world of the people in the modern era' (p. 15).

18 Y.-M. Bercé, in his introduction to *Fête et révolte*, observes how the *fête/révolte* ambiguity is one of our time's mythologies. More recently the young generation couples revolt to explosions of *gaité* and *débordements heureux* typical of holidays (p. 7). The same analogy is drawn by Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie in his celebrated *Carnival in Romans*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth 1981 (1st edn 1979), p. 280. Where events in Roman times are defined as 'a nearly perfect example of class struggle' (p. 269), in the case of the 1968 protest he writes that

> the Sorbonne students, members of the ruling class whether they liked it or not, and despite their challenge to authority, made use of the Carnival theme of an upside-down world with rebels in power. The workers who joined them in a general strike, however, limited themselves to what seemed to them a rational course of action, with no folklore about it. Through standard union bargaining procedures they won a hefty wage increase.
>
> (p. 280)

19 See D. Fabre, 'Le monde du Carnaval', in *Annales ESC*, 31/2, 1976, pp. 389–406; J. Lafond and A. Redondo, *L'image du monde renversé et ses representations littéraires et paralittéraires de la fin du XVIe siècle au milieu du XVIIe*, Paris: J. Vrin, 1979.

20 Bercé, *Fête et révolte*, p. 138.

21 Camporesi, *Rustici e buffoni*, p. 61.

22 But see Roger Chartier's investigation of the complex nexus between popular culture and popular political action: 'Culture populaire et culture politique dans l'Ancien régime: quelques reflexions', in K. M. Baker (ed.), *The Political Culture of the Old Regime*, vol. I of K. M. Baker, F. Furet and C. Lucas (eds), *The French Revolution and the Creation of Modern Political Culture*, Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1987, pp. 243–60.

23 Bercé, *Fête et révolte*, p. 55.

24 See N. Wachtel, 'L'acculturation', in J. Le Goff and P. Nora, *Faire de l'histoire*, 3 vols, Paris: Gallimard, 1974, vol. I, pp. 124–46; A. Dupront, *L'acculturazione: storia e scienze umane*, Turin: Einaudi, 1966.

25 R. Redfield, *La piccola comunità, la società e la cultura contadina*, Turin: Rosenberg & Sellier, 1976 (1st edn 1960).

26 Burke, *Popular Culture*, p. 28. Note Piero Camporesi's reaction to Burke's approach. In his view, Burke's book, 'in its aseptic, insular impartiality reflects a solid, British, *grande bourgeoisie* tradition rather than a class ideology', and gives preference to 'intuitions and hypotheses of renewal of Slavonic culture, that is, to expressions of a world in which rural populism is a physiological presence rather than a cultural tradition', *Rustici e buffoni*, p. 6.

27 P. Clemente, *Movimento operaio, cultura di sinistra e folklore*, in P. Clemente, M. L. Meoni and M. Squillacciotti, *Il dibattito sul folklore in Italia*, Milan: Edizioni di cultura popolare, 1976, p. 33. On Levi see also the issue 'Carlo Levi: riletture', dedicated to his work by the journal *Meridiana. Rivista di storia e scienze sociali*, 53 (2005).

28 See R. Cipriani, 'Cultura popolare e orientamenti ideologici', in Cipriani, (ed.), *Sociologia della cultura popolare in Italia*, Naples: Liguori, 1979, pp. 13–57.

29 See Antonio Banfi's report, entitled 'Il problema etico-sociale della cultura popolare in Italia', in *Atti del primo congresso nazionale della cultura popolare*, Milan: Vallardi, 1948. The congress was held in Florence, 15–18 October 1947.
30 R. Di Donato, *I greci selvaggi: antropologia storica di Ernesto de Martino*, Rome: Manifestolibri, 1999; G. Sasso, *Ernesto de Martino tra religione e filosofia*, Naples: Bibliopolis, 2001; C. Gallini (ed.), *Ernesto de Martino e la formazione del suo pensiero: note di metodo*, Naples: Liguori, 2005.
31 R. Rauty (ed.), *Cultura popolare e marxismo*, Rome: Editori riuniti, 1976. See also G. Cocchiara, in the 1947 revised edition of his work (*Storia degli studi delle tradizioni popolari in Italia*); now in *Storia del folklore in Italia*, Palermo: Sellerio, 1981, pp. 254–9. See also P. Angelini (ed.), *Dibattito sulla cultura delle classi subalterne (1945–50)*, Rome: Savelli, 1977; C. Pasquinelli, *Antropologia culturale e questione meridionale: Ernesto De Martino e il dibattito sul mondo popolare subalterno negli anni 1948–55*, Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1977.
32 See G. Giarrizzo, 'Moralità scientifica e folklore', *Lo spettatore italiano*, VII/4 (1954), pp. 180–4.
33 E. J. Hobsbawm, 'Per lo studio delle classi popolari subalterne', *Società*, 3 (1960), pp. 436–49.
34 C. Ginzburg, 'Witches and Shamans', *New Left Review*, 200 (1993), pp. 75–85; now in *Thread and Traces. True, False, Fictive*, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2012, pp. 215–28. See also Ginzburg's observations on De Martino: 'Momigliano e De Martino', *Rivista Storica Italiana*, C (1988), fasc. 2, pp. 400–13.
35 C. Ginzburg, *I Benandanti*, Turin: Einaudi, 1972 (1st edn 1966), p. xvii; translated into English as *The Night Battles. Witchcraft and Agrarian Cults in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, London, Melbourne and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983 (1st edn 1966).
36 Ginzburg, *Night Battles*, pp. xvii–xviii. But see the different conclusion of Andrea Del Col in his preface to Franco Nardon, *Benandanti e inquisitori nel Friuli del Seicento*, Trieste: Università di Trieste, 1999, p. 10.
37 V. J. Propp, *Morfologia della fiaba*, Turin: Einaudi, 1966 (1st edn 1928).
38 C. Ginzburg, 'Folklore, magia, religione', in *Storia d'Italia*, vol. II: *I caratteri originali*, Turin: Einaudi, 1972, pp. 603–76.
39 The book of Cocchiara, *Il mondo alla rovescia*, 1963, was reprinted by Bollati Boringhieri in 1981 with a foreword (which was effectively an essay in itself) by Piero Camporesi.
40 Ginzburg, 'Folklore, magia, religione', p. 676.
41 Translated into English as *The Cheese and the Worms. The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980; I quote from the 1982 Penguin edition, note to the second paragraph of the preface, pp. 129–30.
42 Ibid., p. xxvi.
43 Ibid., pp. xxii–iii.
44 A. M. Cirese, *Cultura egemonica e culture subalterne. Rassegna degli studi sul mondo popolare tradizionale*, Palermo: Palumbo, 1971.
45 M. de Certeau, D. Julia and J. Revel, 'La beauté du mort: le concept de culture populaire', *Politique aujourd'hui*, 1970, fasc. 12, pp. 3–23. But see also D. Kalifa, 'Les historiens français et "le populaire"', in M. Lits, *Populaire et populisme*, Paris: CNRS, 2010 (previously published in *Hermes*, issue dedicated to 'Peuple, populaire, populisme', 42 (2005), pp. 54–9).
46 For the authors of 'La beauté du mort', the construction of popular culture is strictly connected to the process of repression: ibid., p.12.
47 Ginzburg has recently depicted Menocchio as a person caught between two cultures: C. Ginzburg, 'Tu di dove sei?', in A. Colonnello and A. Del Col (eds), *Uno storico, un mugnaio, un libro*, Trieste: Università di Trieste, 2003, p. 156.
48 See C. Ginzburg, 'Stregoneria, magia e religione in Europa tra medioevo ed età moderna', *Ricerche di storia sociale e religiosa*, 6/11 (1977), pp. 119–33; Ginzburg defines

as 'ambiguous' the term 'popular religion' and as 'scarcely satisfactory' the expression 'popular culture', but he concludes that they need to be used because 'generic classism is always a positive step forward with respect to interclassism' (p. 124). It is possible also to use the term folklore (as proposed by C. Schmitt, 'Religion populaire et culture folklorique', *Annales E.S.C.*, 31/5 (1976), pp. 941–53), but – he concludes – it should be made clear that folklore means 'the culture of the popular classes' as established by Luigi Lombardi Satriani (*Antropologia culturale e analisi della cultura subalterna*, Messina: Peloritana, 1968), who defined folklore as a culture of dissenters against the established system of power.

49 See, for example, R. Manselli, *La religione popolare nel Medioevo*, Turin: Giappichelli, 1974.

50 From the *Premessa giustificativa* to the issue edited by him and dedicated to *Religioni delle classi popolari*, in *Quaderni storici*, 14/2 (1979), p. 396.

51 C. Ginzburg, *Ecstasies. Deciphering the Witches' Sabbath*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1991 (1st edn 1989); I quote from the 1992 Penguin edition.

52 Ibid., p. 11. G. Busino, 'La microhistoire de Carlo Ginzburg', *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance*, 61/3 (1999), pp. 763–78, republished as 'Pour une lecture des travaux de Carlo Ginzburg causalisme, symétrie et réflexivité', in G. Berthoud and G. Busino (eds), *Paroles reçues. Du bon usage des sciences sociales*, Geneva-Paris: Droz, 2000, pp. 400–19.

53 A. Tenenti, 'Una nuova ricerca sulla stregoneria', *Studi Storici*, 8/2 (1967), pp. 385–90.

54 Ibid., p. 388.

55 P. Zambelli, '"Uno, due, tre, mille Menocchio." Della generazione spontanea (o della cosmogonia "autonoma") di un mugnaio cinquecentesco', *Archivio Storico Italiano*, 137/1 (1979), pp. 51–90. Ginzburg responded by denying that he had postulated a total autonomy of peasant culture. *The Cheese and the Worms. The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980, pp. 154–5.

56 It is basically the same culture that is possible to find in Giordano Bruno, someone 'unlikely to be included in a stratum of obscure peasant mythologies'. G. Spini, 'Noterelle libertine', *Rivista Storica Italiana*, 88/1 (1976), p. 800.

57 More recently Andrea Del Col has seen in Menocchio's dualistic worldview (and its concomitant soteriology) echoes, above all, of Cathar gnosticism: see *Domenico Scandella detto Menocchio. I processi dell'Inquisizione (1583–99)*, Pordenone: Biblioteca dell'immagine, 1990; see also J. Boutier and P. Boutry, 'L'invention historiographique. Autour du dossier Menocchio', *Enquête*, 3 (1996), pp. 165–76.

58 S. Kaplan (ed.), *Understanding Popular Culture. Europe from the Middle Ages to the 19th Century*, Berlin: Mouton, 1984; see also A. Paredes and R. Bauman (eds), *Towards New Perspectives in Folklore*, Austin and London: University of Texas Press, 1972.

59 Kaplan, *Understanding Popular Culture*, p. 1.

60 S. Clark, 'French Historians and Early Modern Popular Culture', *Past and Present*, 100 (August 1983), pp. 62–99; also, Clark, 'Inversion, Misrule and the Meaning of Witchcraft', *Past and Present*, 87 (May 1980), pp. 98–127.

61 Clark, 'French Historians', pp. 97–9. Clark could well have used here Ludwig Wittgenstein's comments on Frazer: see *Bemerkungen über Frazers Golden Bough – Remark's on Frazer's Golden Bough*, edited by R. Rhees, Newark: Brynmill, 2010, p. 8. These pages contain a famous debunking of the cultural presumption of Frazer's approach to anthropology:

> Frazer is much more savage than most of his savages, for these savages will not be so far from any understanding of spiritual matters as an Englishman of the twentieth century. His explanations of the primitive observances are much cruder than the sense of the observances themselves.

For a quite different assessment of Frazer and his intellectual legacy, see E. Gellner, 'James Frazer and Cambridge Anthropology', in R. Mason (ed.), *Cambridge Minds*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, pp. 204–17.

62 J. Wirth, 'Against the Acculturation Thesis', in K. von Greyerz (ed.), *Religion and Society in Early Modern Europe*, London, Boston and Sydney: George Allen and Unwin, 1984, pp. 66–88.

63 Ibid., pp. 69–71. See also J. Cashmere, 'The Social Uses of Violence in Ritual: Charivari or Religious Persecution?', *European History Quarterly*, 21/3 (1991), pp. 291–320.
64 D. La Capra, *History and Criticism*, Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1985, pp. 45–69.
65 For Ginzburg, even Nicodemism

> seems the answer to the failure of the peasants' revolt, that is, to the most advanced wing of the Reformation. From this failure derived the separation, so alien to the spirit of the early Reformation, between the religion of the simple, of the masses, and the religion of the chosen few, who were conscious of the vanity of ceremonies and of appearances.
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> *(Il nicodemismo. Simulazione e dissimulazione religiosa nell'Europa del '500,* Turin: Einaudi, 1970, p. xvi*)*

66 P. Anderson, 'Witchcraft', *London Review of Books*, 12/21 (8 November 1990), pp. 6–11, with Ginzburg's reply. Anderson has recently returned to the subject in his review of *Threads and Traces*: his review, entitled 'The Force of Anomaly', attempts to trace Ginzburg's entire intellectual trajectory: see *London Review of Books*, 34/8 (26 April 2012), pp. 3–13.
67 See also the critique by E. P. Thompson, 'Folklore, Anthropology and Social History', *Indian Historical Review*, 3/2 (January 1978), pp. 247–66.
68 Anderson, *Witchcraft*. See also Giovanni Filoramo's strongly critical, 'Una storia infinita: la "storia notturna" di Carlo Ginzburg', *Rivista di storia e letteratura religiosa*, 27/2 (1991), pp. 283–96; and G. Grado Merlo's review in *Rivista Storica Italiana*, 102/I (1990), pp. 212–28.
69 See, for example, C. Mukerji and M. Schudson (eds), *Rethinking Popular Culture. Contemporary Perspectives in Cultural Studies*, Berkeley, Los Angeles and Oxford: University of California Press, 1991.
70 An exception was G. Strauss in 'Viewpoint: The Dilemma of Popular History', *Past and Present*, 132 (August 1991), pp. 130–49.
71 For sociology, see C. Grignon and J.-C. Passeron, *Le savant et le populaire. Misérabilisme et populisme en sociologie et en litérature*, Paris: Gallimard et Le Seuil, 1989.
72 B. Scribner, 'Reformation, Carnival and the World Upside-Down', *Social History*, 3 (1978), pp. 303–29.
73 P. Clemente, 'Idee del carnevale', in P. Clemente, P. Solinas et al., *Il linguaggio, il corpo, la festa. Per un ripensamento della tematica di Mikhail Bachtin*, Milan: Franco Angeli, 1983, p. 13.
74 Ibid., p. 16
75 Clemente recalls Caro Baroja's diffidence about 'seeking the root of all this in "prehistoric cult" and in an age-old culture which was reconstructed and adapted by a given notion of primitivism: in so doing humans are stripped of all capacity and we behave, like judges of Holy Progress, if not of the Holy Office'. Hence his hostility to putting the Carnival 'in the same pot as Attis, Adonis and Osiris as well as an array of gods and ancient and medieval beings so as to extract finally "the pure spirit of vegetation", an unadulterated, authentic, and, above all, primaeval vegetable broth. May the souls of these scholars rest in peace': ibid., p. 24.
76 B. Pianta, *Cultura popolare*, Milan: Garzanti, 1982, p. 54.
77 C. Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*, New York: Basic Books, 1973; Geertz, *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretative Anthropology*, New York: Basic Books, 1983.
78 See, for example, Renato Rosaldo's caustic parallel discussion of E. E. Evans-Pritchard's *Nuer* and E. Le Roy Ladurie's *Montaillou* in 'From the Door of His Tent: The Fieldworker and the Inquisitor', in J. Clifford and G. E. Marcus (eds), *Writing Cultures. The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1986, pp. 77–97; Carlo Ginzburg, using different parameters, stressed the inquisitor/historian analogy: *The Inquisitor as Anthropologist* (an article from 1989,

later republished in *Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013, pp. 156–64), which brought forth a critical response from Del Col, *Domenico Scandella detto Menocchio*, pp. lii–liii.

79 M. Herzfeld, *Ours Once More: Folklore, Ideology and the Making of Modern Greece*, New York: Pella, 1986; Herzfeld, *Anthropology through the Looking-Glass. Critical Ethnology in the Margins of Europe*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.

80 R. Schenda, 'Folklore e cultura di massa', in P. Clemente and F. Mugnaini (eds), *Oltre il folklore. Tradizioni popolari e antropologia nella società contemporanea*, Rome: Carocci, 2001, p. 78.

81 R. Bauman, 'La ricerca sul campo in ambito folklorico, nelle sue relazioni contestuali', ibid., p. 99.

82 J. Procter, *Stuart Hall*, London and New York: Routledge, 2004.

83 F. Dei, *Beethoven e le mondine. Ripensare la cultura popolare*, Rome: Meltemi, 2002, p. 18.

84 G. Lenclud, 'La tradizione non è più quella di un tempo', in Clemente and Mugnaini, *Oltre il folklore*, p. 131. Lenclud then tells the story of a Parisian laundry with a sign saying: 'Parfait, Poyanne's apprentice'. As Lenclud notes, probably no one knows who Poyanne was and what were the skills which she passed on, 'however, these few words hint at the true basis of a tradition: a prestigious and rather distant origin, mysterious expertise, accumulated knowledge, an exclusive legacy, a proclamation of diversity and an assertion of authority. In short, we have a tradition' (p. 133).

85 P. Clemente, 'Oltre l'orizzonte', postscript to H. Bausinger, *Cultura popolare e mondo tecnologico*, Naples: Guida, 2005, pp. 235–70, at p. 251.

86 Ibid., p. 250.

87 Ibid.

88 Ibid., p. 255.

89 Dei, *Beethoven e le mondine*, p. 13.

90 H. Bausinger, *Folk Culture in a World of Technology*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990 (1st edn 1961).

91 Bausinger writes:

> *Märchen* today are generally expected to feature old-fashioned requisites: costumes worn in earlier times, instruments which are no longer played, even social conditions as they existed in the past. In part it is precisely because Grimms' *Märchen* cater to this need for antiquated requisites and forms that they have remained the representative form of the *Märchen* for more than a century. The law of requisite shift has largely been replaced by the law of *Requisitenerstarrung* (requisite freezing). (ibid., p. 76)

92 Ibid., p. 70, note 39.

93 P. Clemente, 'Epifanie di perdenti', in S. Bertelli and P. Clemente, *Tracce dei vinti*, Florence: Ponte alle Grazie, 1994, p. 15.

94 W. A. Christian, *Local Religion in Sixteenth-Century Spain*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991.

95 For the history of folklore studies in Britain, see R. M. Dorson, *The British Folklorists: A History*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968.

96 See J. Brand, *Observations on Popular Antiquities*, London: T. Saint, 1777.

97 A. Walsham, 'Recording Superstition in Early Modern Britain: The Origins of Folklore', in S. A. Smith and A. Knight (eds), *The Religion of Fools? Superstition Past and Present*, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2008, pp. 178–206.

98 Burke, *Popular Culture*, p. 3.

99 Obviously there is a vast bibliography on the Brothers Grimm: the reference here is to the debate inaugurated by J. M. Ellis in *One Fairy Story Too Many: The Brothers Grimm and Their Tales*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983.

100 Burke, *Popular Culture*, p. 21.

101 Quoted by Burke, ibid., pp. 20–1.

102 On Edward Burnett Tylor and the concept of primitive culture, see J. Storey, *Inventing Popular Culture. From Folklore to Globalization*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2003, pp. 6–7.
103 Burke, *Popular Culture*, p. 18.
104 For Macpherson, see Ian Haywood, *The Making of History. A Study of the Literary Forgeries of James Macpherson and Thomas Chatterton in Relation to Eighteenth-Century Ideas of History and Fiction*, London: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 1986. On the relations between history and fiction, see A. Grafton, *Forgers and Critics: Creativity and Duplicity in Western Scholarship*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990; J. Caro Baroja, *Las falsificaciones de la historia (en relación con la de España)*, Barcelona: Circulo de lectores, 1991.
105 F. Benigno, 'Le menzogne dell'abate Vella', in S. Luzzatto and G. Pedullà (eds), *Atlante storico della letteratura italiana*, vol. II, Turin: Einaudi, 2011, pp. 789–97.
106 Burke, *Popular Culture*, pp. 18–20.
107 C. Mondon, 'Le mythe du peuple: de Herder aux romantiques de Heidelberg', in J.-M. Paul (ed.), *Le peuple. Mythe et réalité*, Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2007, pp. 17–27.
108 J. Michelet, *The People*, Urbana, Chicago and London: University of Illinois Press, 1973 (1st edn Paris 1846). For Michelet's concept of the people, see *Michelet et 'le peuple': Actes du colloque tenu à l'Université de Nanterre le samedi 23 fevrier 1975*, Nanterre: Université Paris X-Nanterre, 1975; A. Pessin, *Le mythe du peuple et la société française du XIXe siècle*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1992, pp. 99–126.
109 Michelet's concept of degeneration needs to be further explored and distinguished from the quite dissimilar views of William Cooke Taylor or Richard Whately, which were demolished in the second half of the century in the onslaught of evolutionist and progressive ideas; see U. Fabietti (ed.), *Alle origini dell'antropologia*, Turin: Boringhieri, 1980, especially pp. 37–45.
110 J.-M. Paul, 'Sur le peuple et la France chez Michelet', in Paul (ed.) *Le peuple. Mythe et réalité*, pp. 89–104; also Paul (ed.), *La foule. Mythes et figures. De la révolution à aujourd'hui*, Rennes: Université d'Angers, 2004.
111 Storey, *Inventing Popular Culture*, pp. 13–14; see also his *An Introduction to Cultural Theory and Popular Culture*, London: Prentice Hall, 1997.

3

PUBLIC OPINION

Until recently, and even to this day, anyone consulting a general history of the development of information and communication systems will find that the model predominantly used to trace the birth and evolution of the modern public sphere in the period from the eighteenth to the twentieth century is still along the lines established by Jürgen Habermas in his classic study *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit* (1962).[1] The extraordinary success which this text encountered in European culture and, in the last two decades, in the English-speaking world,[2] has frequently and variously been commented on.[3] Despite the fact that historical and sociological criticism has revealed the unreliability of his hypothesis on the process whereby a 'bourgeois public sphere' came into being – such criticism included even a careful deconstruction of the very terms *bourgeois*, *public* and *sphere* – his book continues to command a vast readership, and to enjoy broad public acclaim. Ironically, this fact in itself may be seen as proof of the complexity of the mechanisms – and of how little they depend on the simple force of rational argument – which underlie not only academic communication but communication in general.

At first glance, one of the reasons for this success was the interdisciplinary nature of Habermas' text: it was a philosophical work written along lines similar to the Frankfurt School's critique of the idealistic tradition; at the same time it was a historical and sociological treatise strongly influenced by Weber's thinking and yet permeated by Marxism; and, finally, it was a vast historical and economic study which successfully followed, and transformed, a progressive programme.[4] His skill in merging into one text so many and varied strands of thought is what made his work seem like a symphony where everything magically comes together to tell the story of the rise and fall of the public sphere.[5] For the ascending phase of the bourgeois public sphere, it recounts the development of the market and the growth of social differentiation, the emergence of an individualistic bourgeois sensibility, the development of rational criticism, and the spread of the printed press

and of new spaces of socialization. For the descending phase, it recounts changes in the late capitalist economy, the merging of the public and the private, the convergence of the state and civil society, the creation of new intermediary bodies and, finally, what the author denounced as the public sphere's loss of its critical function and, with the advent of new media, the dismantling of the mechanisms which had shaped public debate.

However, at a deeper level, the continuing success of Habermas' approach (which as late as the 1990s he persisted in claiming was essentially correct) was really due to the fact that it was one of the most persuasive versions of the grand narrative of European modernity: his underlying theme was the classic one of how the eighteenth century, thanks to particular circumstances, witnessed the birth of a new world which was radically unlike, and counterposed to, the so-called *ancien régime*. What nowadays strikes the reader about Habermas' treatment of this theme was his reluctance to include what he termed 'social welfare state mass democracy', on the grounds that it was a senescent and, if the term were not so laden with connotations, a 'degenerate' version of the public sphere as it had been idealistically envisaged and historically glimpsed at the dawn of bourgeois sociability.[6] The result was that Habermas' short twentieth century was very short indeed, and left room both for the pessimism of the intellect about the devastating trends in neo-capitalism and the optimism of the will about the possibilities of a far from easy regeneration stemming from political movements: such a blend of cultural pessimism and political optimism was an important reason for the book's success, which extended far beyond the 1968 generation of German students.[7]

At the heart of his epochal narrative there was a core element which Habermas did not elaborate but simply inherited and restated: that is, the conception of the relationship between state and society or, in other words, between absolutist politics and the rise of democracy. It is this the real and profound reason for his book's success and it is this also that explains the various difficulties his ideas successively encountered. On this crucial point Habermas strongly relied on Reinhart Koselleck's important *Kritik und Krise*, written in 1954 and published in 1959.[8] The resemblance between the reconstructions proposed in these two influential books has often been noted,[9] as have the markedly different, in fact opposed, political and ideal choices underpinning their arguments.[10] However, the fact remains that perhaps not enough stress has been placed on the common core element.

1 Critique as the matrix of the crisis

Based on a thesis defended before Carl Schmitt in Heidelberg in 1954, *Kritik und Krise* is a painful and passionate public and personal meditation on the state of Germany. After the war the dramatic question at the fore of the thinking of the entire German intellectual community was a search for the causes of the recent tragedy, that is, the fatal attraction, the descent into despotism and the demonic forces of unreason which had led the country into the abyss.[11] All leading German intellectuals were intent on searching for an answer to what, in Friedrich

Meinecke's words, had been 'the German catastrophe',[12] and not all of them were prepared to subscribe to the basically self-absolving answer put forward by Karl Jaspers in *Die Schuldfrage*.[13] On the other side of the Atlantic, Horkheimer and Adorno were developing their thinking on the causes and consequences of the so-called eclipse of reason, publishing *Dialektik der Aufklärung* in Holland in 1947 before returning to Germany in 1950 and founding the *Institut für Sozialforschung* in Frankfurt;[14] Ernst Cassirer was denouncing what he called the myth of the state;[15] in Germany, intellectuals such as Alfred Döblin found the cause of the German tragedy in utopianism, Franz Borkenau attacked the pro-Stalinist positions of Isaac Deutscher, and Karl Löwith, in Heidelberg after 1949, expounded his thoughts on how redemption had been secularized into a worldly philosophy of progress, defining utopianism as the secular version of salvation.[16] What was taking place was a grand civil discussion on the *burden of our times* (exactly the title of the first British edition of Hannah Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism*).[17]

Kritik und Krise was also, as is well known, a bitter, tormented denunciation of the rise of a 'new barbarism', of the tragic aspect of progress, of the self-destruction of the Enlightenment and its descent into myopic pragmatism and vulgar positivism; this was basically a reworking of Schmitt's ideas (later to be developed by Roman Schnur, another of his pupils) on the European civil war. In his preface to the second edition, in 1969, Koselleck acknowledged that he saw as the central theme of his own thinking a view of the Enlightenment which, failing to recognize its own political limitations, slid into utopianism and consequentially into contradictory philosophies of history, thus paving the way for civil war.

As is stated clearly in the subtitle – *Enlightenment and the Pathogenesis of Modern Society* – Koselleck's thesis was that *critique*, that is, the rise of a utopian philosophy of history, was the cause of the revolutionary *crisis*, and so lay at the origin of the ills of the contemporary world. At the time this meant not just a Europe and Germany divided into two blocs and, in the case of Berlin, separated by a wall, but also to the civil war latent beneath the so-called cold war, which Schmitt for this reason referred to as the 'cold civil war' (referring to his exposure of denazification and of the search for scapegoats in his book of 1950 *Ex captivitate salus*).[18]

For Koselleck the bourgeois philosophy of history came into being with the emergence of the concept of *critique* in the period of absolutism. As part of the artistic and literary critique exercised by a highly developed intellectual community, the contrast between ancient and modern was initially formulated and then elaborated into a historical conception which sharply divided past and present. Further, eschatology (and here the reference is clearly to Karl Löwith) was transposed into a progressive view of history. The previously inscrutable divine scheme of salvation was transmuted into the new bourgeois élite's future planning, which was seen as morally just and in keeping with reason.

Koselleck followed in Schmitt's footsteps, and, more generally, his thinking was within an intellectual framework which had progressively established itself in German historiography of the 1930s: the absolutist state, the archetype of the modern state, having overcome the division produced by the wars of religion,

subsequently assumed, in Hobbesian terms, absolute sovereignty and responsibility, which necessarily required untrammelled domination over all its subjects.[19] It needs to be stressed that this intromission of absolute power led to the separation of the inner and the outer spheres. To put it in Hobbesian terms: 'The man of sense withdrew into the secluded recesses of his heart, where he remained his own judge, while his outer actions were necessarily subordinated to the judgement and the verdict of his master.'[20] Moreover, absolutism, by disaggregating the traditional class structure, made individuals into subjects, which was a condition for the bourgeois rule of law.

The bourgeois intelligentsia came into being in this inner, private space to which the state had relegated its subjects. From this inner, moral sphere of *Anderssein*, individuals gradually moved towards the outer, purely political sphere: each step towards the light, Koselleck wrote, was an act of enlightenment which challenged the *arcana imperii*. The private, inner sphere expanded until it became a public sphere within the republic of letters and Masonry, in both of which the principle of equality established itself: this is a phase to which Koselleck dedicated penetrating pages. Both from *critique* and from the Masonic movement, there later emerged pressures which eroded absolutist regimes, and thus superseded Hobbes' inner/outer dichotomy. *Critique*, seen as an all-powerful practice, was extended to politics without relinquishing its claim to rationality and morality which was vouchsafed by its possession of the truth.

However, during this process of demystification, critique gradually lost sight of its purpose and became self-referential and blinkered. By claiming to be the supreme public arbiter on the grounds of the primacy of morality over political decision-making, it paved the way for revolution. The moral conscience was subordinated to political imperatives and political decision-making was declared morally guilty. The quest was for a new ordering of the state and, as in the case of Rousseau, the result was permanent revolution and the total state. Public opinion's much-sought-after aspiration to leadership became an ideology, that is, a means of achieving dominance. This ideological dominance could no longer be confined to the outer sphere but extended to the inner, individual sphere, and came to dominate the individual conscience. Utopianism, a legacy of the Enlightenment and a response to absolutism, signalled the birth of modernity.

At the heart of the analysis in *Kritik und Krise* we find Schmitt's thesis – which Roman Schnur would further develop in his *Individualismus und Absolutismus*[21] – of the genesis under absolutism of the bourgeois individualism which became hegemonic in German culture:[22] that is, modernity was defined as a world which had at its centre the absolute state's forced separation of morality and politics.

2 A utopia of communication

In his book, Habermas acknowledged his debt to *Kritik und Krise* but without giving particular importance to the matter. However, there is no doubt that Habermas also responded to numerous other stimuli which emerged in the late 1950s. In the 1990s he himself stressed the influence on his work of the broad

debate on the essence and value of the welfare state which was occupying the minds of German jurists.[23] However, the evolutionary process that signalled the success of the new bourgeois discursiveness inevitably takes us back to the framework which Koselleck proposed in the wake of Schmitt. Indeed, it was within this framework that it became clear to him that the new individual was, Janus-like, both *bourgeois* and *homme* and therefore a classic image of the contradictory tensions which marked the period: *both* the theoretical aspiration to universality and to liberation, brought about by the application of the values of rationality, *and* the actual conservation of class interests, class being demarcated both by culture and by property ownership. Similarly, in Habermas' thinking, the terrain on which the new bourgeois public sphere tested its strength was cultural, literary and artistic *critique*: it was this arena for public debate which emerged, expanded its scope and slowly grew in size. The public sphere was born within the bourgeoisie as an extension of the sphere of family intimacy and subsequently developed into a debate about literature which imposed no clear limits on itself and so tended to concern itself with political subjects, which potentially put it into conflict with absolutism. This *literary* debate, which foreshadowed the public sphere's engagement with political functions, played an important role in Habermas' thinking – when general public issues came within its scope, the debate preserved its character as a rational choice of matters determined by individuals with a comparable level of culture and of rationality, which Habermas considered its most important achievement. This process would eventually lead to the total reversal of Hobbes' formulation of absolute power: *veritas non auctoritas facit legem*. Habermas was perfectly clear on this point: the challenging assertion of rationality, which based power on justice and on the *ratio* of the law, historically developed in step with the public debate among private individuals who, *in so far as they were the public*, served their political apprenticeship in the republic of letters, which treated educated people as equals and accustomed them to consider the strongest argument as being decisive. In short, it was morally based rationality which aimed to achieve an equivalence between reason and justice. The result was that 'a political consciousness developed in the public sphere of civil society, in opposition to absolute sovereignty, articulated the concept and demand for general and abstract laws and which ultimately came to assert itself (i.e. public opinion) as the only legitimate source of this law'.[24]

Briefly stated, for a 'public sphere with political functions' to come into being, a space had to be created where people could learn to be confident of their own subjectivity by using and communicating questions arising from their own inner sphere. This was a utopian vision of a shared rationality which was seen as able to dissolve power structures. It was a viewpoint to which Habermas would adhere in his subsequent works, including the *Theory of Communicative Action*.[25]

3 A deformed *ancien régime*

Habermas' theses were subjected to considerable debate, theoretically, philosophically, and at a historical level.[26] It has rightly been noted that his tendency to identify

literary and bourgeois space is somewhat arbitrary: Masonry, far from being an association of private individuals, included in its ranks numerous sovereigns who not infrequently manipulated the organization to further their own political goals; Habermas' account of the style of critical debate was an idealization when set alongside the real world of conflicts, which were neither innocent nor disinterested; and the outcomes of public controversy, rather than being decided by the victory of the best argument, often resulted in the triumph of views which were more convenient or expedient.[27] However, the reason why Habermas, despite mounting criticism, never jettisoned his original approach was that the idea of the creation of a universal community of thinkers equally endowed with reason was, and remained, fundamental to the very structure of his argument: this is apparent in the final part of the book where Habermas evoked as a future solution the ideal of a critical, universal public sphere, freed of bourgeois ambiguity about its human and property-owning aspects.[28]

From this point of view, his representation, which now seems rather questionable, of the *ancien régime* as being characterized by a ceremonial 'representative public sphere', which was a prerogative of the aristocracy, allowed him to contrast it with its antithesis, the bourgeois public sphere and its ideal features. Over the last half century, the findings of historical research have done away with this model, and today it is no longer possible to imagine a state being formed in the way that was postulated at the beginning of the 1960s: that is, by the retrospective application of late nineteenth-century models which tended to stress the development of the bureaucratic apparatus as the key element of centralization and of future advances towards modernization. It became clear that, in the *ancien régime*, political participation and the *droit de conseil* were not confined to the political élite.[29] In various ways and forms – from petition to supplication – European subjects maintained the right to appeal to their sovereign viewed as a restorer, that is, as one able to right wrongs and to cure social ills. Habermas avoided discussion of a crucial matter – taxation – which was pivotal to the ever more important question of the lawfulness of state action. The question whether the *princeps* could or could not avail himself of the property and lives of his subjects was, between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries in Europe, the crucial and decisive point of contention between those favouring so-called absolute authority, accused of being tyrannical, and those supporting the idea of a limited and regulated monarchy.

New research in political historiography further broadened the concept of representation. Habermas tended to equate those represented, that is, those subject to institutional power, and the bourgeoisie. As we now know, it is not true that in *ancien régime* societies representation was the monopoly of a single class.[30] Within these tiered societies, after the *oratores* and the *bellatores* there was also room, albeit subordinate, for the *laboratores*. This is shown by the composition of European parliaments with their delegations composed of commoners, their Houses of Commons and the like. Moreover, a seminal book, *The King's Two Bodies* by Ernst Kantorowicz, refined our concept of representation and influenced the discovery of the present-day importance of what we might call the public presentation of power.[31]

It should also be noted that our idea of how the decision-making process operated in so-called absolute monarchies has been given nuance by historical research in the last three decades, and is now seen to have been far more complex than the traditional idea based on Louis XIV's court in Versailles, the so-called 'gilded cage'. We now see that the construction of a firmament with a single, brilliant sun was less a reality than a creation of propaganda: absolutist theoretical prescriptions were at some remove from the actual working of courts, which lay at the confluence of interests and pressures, of clienteles and factions; a court was actually more akin to an enormous lung with a decisive function of osmosis.[32]

One further observation may serve to complete what might be called the distorted view of the *ancien régime* which Habermas presented in order to highlight what were, to his mind, the distinctive features of the bourgeois public sphere: his assertion that, for a given period, public opinion was only to be found at the court of Versailles and that, in the course of the eighteenth century, Paris with its salons, cafés and other meeting places took over the cultural functions of the court.

This is clearly a simplification.[33] Versailles had never been the sole locus of French public opinion. The fact that the process of political decision-making was limited to a small élite did not mean that this élite was inattentive to what people were thinking and to the attitudes which were widespread or prevalent among them. The people were considered as a mute entity, amorphous and easily manipulated, which could be tamed like a horse and was as fickle and voluble as a woman.[34] However, at the same time, the people had to be heeded, as did their changing moods and passions which were expressed in *rumeurs*, in lampoons, in placards and in satires, all of which could be frightening indicators of sudden swings, and could unleash storms.[35] Second, his account of eighteenth-century Paris as a place of culture which supplanted Versailles, which thereafter was merely the locus of *la politique d'abord*, is manifestly false: the great public debates of the second half of the eighteenth century in France, on the Maupeou affair, on war, on taxation, on Jansenism, on the sale of wheat, on the Flour War, on summoning the Estates-General and, finally, on the doubling of the Third Estate's representation did not contrapose city and court but permeated both, and divided both into groups and factions which met and clashed not only in ministerial corridors but in *salons*, Masonic lodges and court cabals.[36]

In the light of recent historiographical research, Habermas' representation of *ancien régime* society was thoroughly unrealistic but, despite this, it served a fundamental role in his thinking, which was to provide a background which, by contrast, highlighted the formation of the bourgeois public sphere.

4 Possible pluralisms

However, the decisive factor was, in fact, another: it was the emergence from absolutism of the private sphere which led Habermas, following Koselleck, to chart the process leading to the creation of the public sphere. The two central elements were specific spaces (coffee-houses and *salons*, Masonic lodges and academies) and

specific periods (England in the first half of the eighteenth century, France in the latter part of the same century, Germany in the first half of the nineteenth century). Habermas opted for a series of factors which came to enjoy wide general acceptance but which, as has been observed, excluded some spaces, such as public squares, demonstrations and political clubs, and some periods, such as the prolonged Dutch revolt against Spain, the two English revolutions, the French Revolution, the national revolutions of the nineteenth century, in all of which the fundamental role of the public sphere was one of political and critical protest. In this sense Habermas' discussion of Chartism seems to me particularly telling as he saw it not as a triumphant assertion of public debate but rather as the beginning of the decline of the bourgeois public sphere when social forces assumed public functions and public powers assumed private functions. That is to say, Habermas, almost willy-nilly, again advanced the inner/outer model linked to the ideological goal of delineating a public sphere which was originally separate and distinct from the state, and which was rationally ordered. It was this which induced him to single out some specific spaces and periods.

The question which arises is whether this clearly underlying monistic choice was inevitable, and whether there were no other approaches available at the time. It may be recalled that, when Habermas was writing, pluralism, even though already in decline, was still the object of broad discussion. In the period between the 1920s and the 1940s, thinkers such as H. Laski, G. D. H. Cole and J. N. Figgis had, each in his own way, aimed to create what may not have been a genuinely pluralist theory of the state but which was certainly an alternative to monistic statism; by developing materials and approaches produced by historians and jurists such as Otto von Gierke and Frederic William Maitland with ties to Fabianism and Guild Socialism, these thinkers, despite their frequently unsystematic and theoretically weak approach, did attempt to delineate democracy as a stable and constitutionalized form of political contention.[37]

If Habermas' thinking had taken into account a pluralist perspective, his notion of an opposition between a pre-modern period, dominated by a markedly representative dimension of political discourse, and a modern period centred on the constitution of a *public body* that could ideally assemble in an 'unrestricted fashion' would seem to be both historically dubious and unnecessary. As an alternative to 'rationality generated through communication' it has recently been suggested that attention should be paid to *corporate citizenship* and to mechanisms of incorporation by the legalizing of groups through official certification and through their subsequent political initiation, that is, based on the complex world of bodies and *personae fictae*, on ideals of conversation inspired by classical models, and on institutions moulded on notions of the Middle Ages which were invented by the European *ancien régime* itself but which persisted even after the French Revolution.[38]

It is also curious that Habermas completely ignored another, and quite different, point of view which also dates to the 1920s: Walter Lippmann's classic study *Public Opinion*.[39] Far from public opinion being rationally ordered, as it was for Habermas, Lippmann saw it as something opaque, distorted, beset with misunderstandings and prejudices, and composed of internalized stereotypes; above all, it lent itself to

being manipulated. The world to which it refers is basically the political one, not the real world but a world which is 'out of reach, out of sight, out of hand. It has to be explored, reported and imagined'.[40] As for the public, it does not exist, it is an abstraction, a *phantom public*, and its incarnation – the omnicompetent citizen able to come to a personal view about everything – should be considered illusory. It is impossible to give the average person rational information about many important events. Average people form their own ideas not by relying directly on verified *knowledge*, but indirectly through images which they create for themselves or which are created for them. Hence the conception which they form about events depends on numerous things: on how these events are presented, on their emotional content and particularly on the individual's own prejudices. Moreover, citizens (like historians) see their relationship with the world by means of allegory, which enables the personalization of abstract concepts: 'Social Movements, Economic Forces, National Interests, Public Opinion are treated as persons';[41] feelings and identification are mediated by symbols which are able to catalyse emotions which cluster around a compelling image and/or person. Finally, and most significantly, reality – a tangled mass of events which are difficult to apprehend – is not transparent but is mediated: it is only through a given culture and, basically, through stereotypes that the world and what we see are categorized, and so become recognizable. These images thus become the vehicle for representing 'public affairs': 'Pictures have always been the surest way of conveying an idea, and next in order, words that call up pictures in memory.'[42]

Since Lippmann's time much water has flowed under the bridge and public opinion has become not only a part of political rhetoric but also a necessary rhetorical tool used by one form of social enquiry, the opinion poll. In a world that has become increasingly complex, only opinion polls now seem able to make sense of the grumblings, anxieties and passions of virtually silent crowds. The powerful of our time find themselves in a position vis-à-vis the public that is in many ways similar to the élite of the *ancien régime*, who were particularly attentive to signs of unrest among their subjects. Common to both groups is the conviction that the people (the public) can be manipulated. Today's opinion polls (like official reports in the past) thus reveal two aspects: in addition to an informative role, they have a performative role, which at times is even more important – that of strengthening the positions of those commissioning the poll and, by explaining and anticipating their positions, of gaining the consensus of public opinion.[43]

This perspective, first articulated by Lippmann, not only makes his one of the fundamental texts in considering the concept of public opinion, but was taken up in the 1930s by theorists of political symbolism. For this school of thought, as for Lippmann before them, perception comes before seeing. In the metaphorical world of politics, perceptions are shaped by the construction of mythical time and are created by choosing, from the past and from an imagined future, elements which serve present-day interests.[44]

In short, what may be called, with some simplification, the American school of political symbolism offers a possible approach to the analysis of the relationship

between the objectivity of power and the subjectivity of politics. Such an approach is completely extraneous to the intellectual models used in formulating the category of *Öffentlichkeit*.

5 Conclusions: counterposed rhetorics

It is only because of the contributions of the thinkers discussed above that it is possible to consider the public sphere as an arena for discussing 'public things' (the public good, the public thing, the state and public affairs): the field of discussion is shaped not by individuals but by ideal and material forces, by old and new social identities, by pressure groups, by economic powerhouses, by corporations and by associations with widely disparate interests. In a sense, public opinion is the mirror of democracy. It is also possible to imagine public opinion not so much as an almost metaphysical entity (an *oversoul*, as Lippmann put it) but more as a rhetoric that has slowly entrenched itself; a rhetoric for legitimizing sovereignty and hence the actions of authority, which at a certain point in the course of the early modern period and in the subsequent emergence of the assertion, and the questioning, of the theory of absolute sovereignty, was no longer able to rely solely on the divine right of kings, and was forced to find new and rational justifications. That is, the language of power and authority now had to express itself less in terms of political theology and more in terms of utilitarian political rationality.

However, this did not mean that political decision-making needed, after a given point, to be subjected, as Habermas wrote, to the 'court of public opinion'. It did mean that there was now a politically important arena where other ways were used to justify or to challenge decision-making.[45] On closer scrutiny, this image of a court recalls the conception of public opinion as akin to a court of review which, as has rightly been observed, was a very French approach: such French-style public opinion may be distinguished from English-style public opinion, which was an expression of the *country*, that is, of the virtuous nation, as opposed to the corrupt court, which was a traditional theme of Whig propaganda.[46] These different styles of political rhetoric took root in particular circumstances and continued to circulate, despite undergoing changes, shifts, influences and modifications. It was the contraposition of *court* and *country*, for example, which basically led to the idea of the separation of state and *civil society*. Not by chance this idea, based on Cicero's concept of the *societas civilis*, was actually elaborated by the Scottish Enlightenment, and was then taken up and given a new slant by Hegel. This same idea found new space in the post-war period, and since 1989 has become a kind of mantra of contemporary politology. In the very concepts of *civil society* and of *public opinion* there is an intrinsic force which challenges the representativeness or even the legitimacy of existing powers by appealing, implicitly or explicitly, to an alternative source of sovereignty, the sovereignty of the people. This is fundamentally the same appeal to the people that during the French Revolution marked the troubled existence of the Legislative Assemblies, which were constantly threatened by the Damoclean sword of mob violence. Even in Restoration France the appeal to

public opinion was, more or less covertly, an appeal to the people; it was a time when the revolutionary *journées* of the people were re-enacted and repeatedly seemed to be returning to life, like the ghost of a never-ending revolution.

To invoke public opinion signifies appealing to the people, questioning the basis of constituted authority and proposing a possible, different sovereignty. Now that we no longer believe in an idealized image of the public sphere, where individuals, who have become the public, realize democracy in a public space: we now think of the public sphere more as an arena parallel to the political and institutional arena which overlaps it and is interrelated to it, where economic, social and political forces 'do politics by other means'. We can think back on the history of the making of the public sphere, without excluding the rhetoric of public opinion, as a story that encompasses and does not expunge the great collective debates on the management of the *res publica*. Hence its origins should not be sought in private, esoteric and academic discussions or in scientific and literary disputes, but rather in debates, confrontations, and clashes on the nature of government and its activity;[47] less in the intimacy of nascent bourgeois privateness, of Masonic secrecy and of the republic of letters, which is privacy conceived of as counterposed to the absoluteness of politics, and more in the decidedly political terrain of a discussion about sovereignty, its claims and its limits.

Notes

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3 See L. Lacché's introduction to the special number on Public Opinion in *Giornale di storia costituzionale*, 6 (2003), pp. 6–7.

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20 Ibid., p. 19.
21 Roman Schnur, *Individualismus und Absolutismus: zur politischen Theorie von Thomas Hobbes (1600–1640)*, Berlin: Duncker und Humbolt, 1963.
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44 On this subject, see F. Benigno and L. Scuccimarra (eds), *Simboli della politica*, Rome: Viella, 2010.
45 For this, see Gerard Hauser's hypotheses in *Vernacular Voices, the Rhetoric of Public and Public Spheres*, Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1999.
46 E. Tortarolo, 'Opinion publique tra antico regime e rivoluzione francese. Contributo a un vocabolario storico della politica settecentesca', *Rivista Storica Italiana*, CII (1990), pp. 5–23.
47 J. A. Guidry and M. Q. Sawyer, 'Contentious Pluralism. The Public Sphere and Democracy', *Perspectives on Politics*, I/2 (2003), pp. 273–89. See also R. Chartier and C. Espejo, *La aparición del periodismo en Europa. Comunicación y propaganda en el Barroco*, Madrid: Marcial Pons, 2012.

4

REVOLUTIONS

Looking back on the course of history, one cannot fail to note some historical events which stand out from others for their exceptional importance: events which created political, social, religious or national structures and which, kept alive by being constantly recounted, continued to be part of the memories of these communities. We are dealing here with grand narratives, with circumstances considered unprecedented and decisive, populated by heroic and tragic figures, and animated by powerful symbols. These epic tales and quasi-mythical accounts indicate a point in time where everything – or, at least, a new epoch – begins; they are generative events which mark the coming into being of a nation's history and, often, of a nation itself. They are revolutions.

There has been at least one revolution in every European nation, and in some non-European ones. Whether remote or proximate in time, a revolution is an unmoved mover, the pivot propagating a story, seen as progressive, which explains the past, gives meaning to the present and shapes the future. This notion of a decisive, unique event, which delivers such a powerful jolt to the course of history as to produce a qualitative leap, is presented within a conceptual framework which proleptically charts the obstacles to be overcome, the phases or the stages of the journey to be undertaken and the outcome to be achieved. The origin of this notion of revolution can be precisely located, and depends on how the most seismic and unimaginable revolution has been conceived: the revolution *par excellence*, the French Revolution.

Underlying the concept of revolution is the semantic shift undergone by the word, which derived from the language of astronomy where it indicated the complete movement of one heavenly body around another.[1] In the middle of the seventeenth century, it came to mean upheavals within a state.[2] The conceptual link between the astronomical and political sense was enshrined in Aristotle's notion (often mediated through Polybius) that there were three basic kinds of

government: republic, where rule is by the people; aristocracy, where nobles rule; and monarchy, where the will of one individual is dominant. Each of these types of government was believed to be subject to decline and even degeneration. Monarchs could begin to abuse their power and become tyrants, thus opening the way for a popular uprising and a republic. Republics could become corrupt and anarchic, thus forcing the nobility to establish an aristocratic regime, which could rigidify into an oligarchy, to replace which there was a return to monarchical government. Political changes thus had a circularity, which made them akin to the circular movement of the planets or of the constellations of astrological charts.

Before the French Revolution, the term revolution thus indicated a change within a state which was seen as virtually a natural phenomenon within a context of recognizable forms. After the Revolution, it began to indicate a watershed event, an irreversible change which separated the before and the after, the former regime from the new, the old from the modern. With the *Grande Révolution* the circular notion was replaced by a unilinear and progressive perspective in which the story of its events became both a model for future revolutions and a way of explaining past revolutions.

The establishing of a 'revolutionary' narrative naturally also modified the meaning of the broader cluster of terms indicating actions which violently transform constituted power such as revolts, rebellions, *coups d'état* and the like. The emergence of the idea of revolution as the model for radical political change led to a downgrading of these other political upheavals which were devalued and negatively categorized as 'non-revolutions', that is, as events incapable of founding a new order. Hence, from the very start, among the actual historical actors who personally took up arms, there was an important discursive battle which was fought alongside the military and political and diplomatic battles: the battle to confer a name and meaning on the events that had taken place. Around the name and the idea of revolution there was a debate over fundamental issues, above all, the right to resist and rebel, that is the legitimacy of the new revolutionary dispensation.

Later, some time after events, when the waters are, or appear to be, calmer, and the various elements of the political and institutional puzzle seem close to a possible resolution, the artillery of pamphlets and the muskets of propaganda are replaced, while things are still fresh in the memory, by the more considered reconstructions of historians. Politics is thus remade in the laboratory by the historian who constructs a world in miniature.[3] Indeed disputes among historians often replicate the various interpretations already operative in the minds of contemporaries: this was the case, for example, of the series of events which began in 1640 with the refusal of the English parliament to allow itself to be dissolved, and which culminated in 1649 with the trial and execution of Charles I. Was this a revolution, forerunner of the 1688 revolution which, in Whig tradition, was the 'Glorious and Bloodless Revolution', or was it a 'Great Rebellion', as it was called in the title of a famous work by Edward Hyde, 1st Earl of Clarendon, which was the origin of an entire Tory view of history? To call an event a 'revolution' (and not a 'rebellion' or a 'revolt') is obviously a way of qualifying it and giving it a special status as an

epochal turning point in a political and/or economic and social sense. A revolution, in other words, is distinguished from other 'upheavals' not because it is of a different nature, or because it has a happy or an unhappy outcome, but because it is an event which has been legitimated as founding a new order which is attributed to it.[4] Revolution is the name we give to a period of rapid upheaval of political and social equilibria and of change to the structures of constituted power. Such a period, interpreted and categorized as a revolution, may also contain within it events defined as revolts, *coups d'état*, rebellions and conspiracies.[5]

This, clearly, does not mean that historiography has been merely a latter-day megaphone for disputes over defining events which occurred in the past. Over time, with the evolution of methods of enquiry and with the institutionalization of history as an academic discipline, a field of study gradually emerged in which revolutionary events were studied in depth, and examined in detail, in search of explanations for a plausible meaning. However, even the gradual establishment of a verifiable use of sources, the growth of critical philology and, finally, the establishment of a rigorous concept of historiography, did not prevent grand ideological schemes from shaping the viewpoint and the language of historians; in particular, revolutions signalled the fundamental stages of the Whig, that is, a liberal and progressive viewpoint. Once this was fused with a Marxist perspective, there came into being what would become the classic conception of revolution which dominated the twentieth century: revolution was defined as an essentially social phenomenon, necessary by nature and progressive by orientation, marking the transition from one fundamental phase of economic, social and political development to another by means of regime change. The bourgeois revolution inaugurated by the French Revolution was followed by the proletarian revolution which, adhering to a similar script, produced what has been called a surprising telescopic effect, which resulted from the fact that the Bolsheviks quite consciously placed themselves in the Jacobin model. It goes without saying that this perspective served to strengthen even further the distinction between 'real' revolutions and all those forms of agitation (putsch, uprisings or plots) which, because of their outcome (failure), of their politically fragmented nature and of the heterogeneous forces mobilized on their behalf, do not lend themselves to be classed as revolutions; in fact, they are removed from the category of significant events or are downgraded to the status of 'immature' or 'abortive' revolutions, which, by being too early or too late, were invariably out of synchronization with an idealized model of their evolution.

1 After the revisionisms

After the 1980s this classic conception of revolution began, first slowly and then rapidly, to unravel under the attacks of 'revisionist' criticism, which, from François Furet to Conrad Russell, had the easy task of exposing the teleological flaws, tautologies and conceptual dead-ends to which this conception had led. One by one, the great revolutions – English, American, French and Russian – were stripped of their overlay of myth and of anachronistic conceptual approaches, which could

be known only to posterity, and were again reconnected to a succession of unpredicted and unpredictable events to which the actors responded with the resources available to them, that is, with their own views of the world and of society. Rather than being necessary transitional stages of a society intent on progress, revolutions were, as seen through the prism of revisionist critique, fortuitous events which occurred in a climate of political struggle, and as a result of factional jockeying; that is, they were seen as events which were dominated by the artificial lure of ideology and hence gave rise to devastating and traumatic effects. Revolution, seen from a revisionist perspective, is political, not social, it is contingent, not necessary, above all it is despotic, not progressive, and it is tendentially totalitarian.

Revisionist approaches, obviously, came with their own ideological baggage. With the passing of time, it became evident that, underlying them, there could be seen a hostile and debunking intention not only to demystify the history of the revolution but also to devalue it, revealing a clear diffidence about any idealism in decisions made by the historical actors, an unwillingness on the part of scholars to declare openly their own standpoint on the pretext that 'the facts speak for themselves', and a propension to consider revolutions basically as disasters attributable to political blunders which occurred not because of incompatible worldviews but as a consequence of an ineffable mixture of material problems, ineptitude and even bad luck.[6]

After an initial phase of lively debate, the influence of revisionist critique, which formed part of the more general intellectual climate of deconstructionism, subsequently produced a partial 'cooling' effect on the subject of revolution by removing it from the list of issues urgently requiring public debate, and entrusting it to the attention of historians who, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, were less inclined to assume their self-appointed role as experts on struggles taking place on any political front. This was matched by a corresponding loss of public interest in the whole subject of revolution and in the possibility of historiography to link revolts and revolutions, *coups d'état* and civil wars, into broader and more solidly based categories and thus open the way for an investigation into forms of political and social conflict driven by new objectives and by the need to respond to unprecedented questions.

This implies, above all, paying attention to the question of identity and to the symbolic aspects connoting it. Revolutions then appear less like pitched battles fought between armies arrayed on opposing sides and more like chaotic scenes, tragic and creative, where new identities form and replace earlier and debilitated identities which for the most part have already become obsolete. In this process of emerging identities and social reshuffling, violence, in keeping with a broader cultural trend, ceases to be an unfortunate mishap similar to collateral damage and becomes the main fulcrum where the process of social change is concentrated.

These are the reasons why the path towards a radical rethinking of the meaning of revolutions is now far more open that it was towards the end of the twentieth century. In the intervening years, the once deafening noise of clashes between supporters of the classic social interpretation and those of a range of revisionist

readings grew fainter and virtually disappeared. No one now gives credence to the classic social interpretation which saw revolutions as a necessary condition for social evolution, and as milestones on the high road to progress. However, revisionist critique proved to be far better at explaining what revolutions were *not* and could *not* be than at telling us what they actually were and how they should nowadays be considered.

An approach attentive to the process of creating political identities also proved to be in close syntony with some of the liveliest trends in contemporary historiography, which may be summarized as a new, post-revisionist political history extended to the complex world of representations, to forms of public communication, and to a dynamic analysis of the processes of the juridical, cultural and symbolic renegotiation of social spaces.[7]

It thus becomes considerably easier to avoid the sterile alternative between the traditional idea, which tends to view political identities as mere expressions of underlying social identities, and the revisionist tendency to focus exclusively on individuals and their relationships, to the point where one loses sight of the matter of collective involvement (as in the case of revisionist approaches to the English Revolution), or where one turns political identities into mere embodiments of ideological discourses (as in the case of such approaches to the French Revolution). The impassioned debate about the question of identity which revolutions engender may now be conceived in a different way as closely linked to the broadening of participation in the public sphere and to the noisy intrusion into the public domain of individuals who hitherto had been merely silent observers.[8]

At the same time, the attention given to the leading role of the common people has been confirmed by the overall, ongoing reorientation of research which aimed to replace the vexed question of the causes of the revolution with a far closer examination of the subjective experience of the historical actors. It was not a question of returning to the old 'history from below', which was conceived on the model of the popular world as imagined in the 1960s and 1970s as an alternative, counterpoised mirror image of the bourgeois world; at issue was the attempt to achieve a fuller and more nuanced view of how, by means of destructuring a cultural, juridical and institutional world, there occurred that crucial extension of the accessibility of political and communicative spaces which was able to propel social change.

2 The mother of all revolutions

Especially in considering the French Revolution, recent research has given prominence to the subject of revolutionary subjectivity. This orientation was partially the result of a reaction to the excessive cultural preponderance of revisionist readings.[9] Faced by the Revolution's loss of standing and by the fact that, in the eyes of many, it had become, in Lynn Hunt's words, 'the symbol of violence, terror, totalitarianism and even of genocide',[10] historiography, describing itself as neo-liberal and even neo-Jacobin,[11] reacted in two ways: by taking up again the old theme of

the force of circumstances, and so highlighting the viscosity and complexity of economic, social and cultural processes,[12] and by stressing the processual (and not ideal) nature of revolutionary politics.[13] The result is that the revolutionaries are nowadays represented, far more appropriately, as being *made* by the revolution rather than being its *makers*.[14]

This stress on how not only historical actors but also common people, especially in working class areas,[15] lived the revolutionary experience[16] is not merely an attempt to break free from the ideological schematism of much historiography and to reassess the revisionist, anti-teleological position (inspired by François Furet) which obliged one to read Robespierre with the image in mind of Stalin, if not, more recently, the image of Osama Bin Laden. As well as this reaction there was also operative the need not to shirk but to explore in greater depth the crucially ambiguous, indeed, ambivalent, nature of the revolution which was simultaneously the dispenser of new human rights and of the unprecedented logic of terror,[17] and which brought freedom as well as death.[18] The need to do so requires also a more thorough description of how people at the time lived and understood, of how they acted and were acted on, and of the new forms of politics and of the new styles of revolutionary violence intrinsically connected with them.[19]

This has led to focusing attention on the years 1793–5, that is, on the Terror, which has been defined as the real, mysterious, monstrous and inexplicable 'dark star' of French history. Among the new approaches proposed by what may be considered the main engine room of recent research into the Revolution, the most interesting are attempts to interpret the Terror as a response to endemic and uncontrollable popular violence, and to examine in depth what has been called the 'emotive economy' of the Terror, that is, the complex of emotions and of ethical (and even aesthetic) notions,[20] which enabled people both to think about the Terror and to manage its tremendous impact on their lives.[21]

Other approaches seeking to account for revolutionary violence were to investigate, using a comparative model, its destructive core which was identified with the popular furies which, even 30 years after Roland Mousnier's classic study,[22] still retains enormous sway over the historiographical imagination;[23] or to see revolutionary violence in a geopolitical framework prefiguring the future constraints of globalization;[24] or else to attenuate it by placing it in a reassuringly European context, which allowed so-called French exceptionalism to be played down.[25]

On the other hand, there have been few attempts to look at the French Revolution from the perspective of the past, by linking it with uprisings in the early modern period and with what the leading revolutionary figures knew about these uprisings: we are referring here not to deep or specialized knowledge but to general knowledge available to the élite, an integral part of which consisted of the political lessons and the useful maxims which were deduced from those historical examples.[26] In fact, an approach of this kind, which is quite in line with the traditional *modus operandi* of historians, could prove rather productive. It would obviate misunderstanding La Rochefoucauld's famous words to Louis XVI who, confronted by the first uprisings in Paris in 1789, worriedly asked him if this was a revolt and

received the answer: '*Non, sire, c'est une Révolution*.' As has been noted, this answer did not amount to a presentiment and a virtual prophecy but was an attempt to place the unknown, that is, unprecedented events, in a context of categories which were already familiar, including the category of revolution, which in this case perhaps referred rather to the recent American War of Independence and to the 'Glorious and Bloodless' Revolution of 1688, which had brought about the exclusion of the Stuarts from the English throne and the gradual establishment of a liberal, parliamentary and constitutional monarchy.

A perspective looking to earlier events, and to the historical and political knowledge able to articulate them in order to explain the history of the *Grande Révolution*, has the considerable advantage of avoiding reading later events retrospectively through the prism of categories which the Revolution itself developed over time to give a sense and to thematize what had happened – or had been experienced – as totally without precedent.[27] In fact, the historical actors grafted new 'Enlightened' and 'Jacobin' ideas onto the traditional model of the *arcana imperii* and of the *exempla* which the past provided. It was this combination which gave rise to the debate over the meaning of the Revolution which has continued for over two centuries.

In other words, the French Revolution provided both the discursive register and the ideas needed to think about revolution. Together they provided a kind of mould, not only for the uprisings of 1830, 1848 and 1871, but also for the Internationalist and socialist movements up to the time of Lenin and beyond. Indeed, the complex of ideas which the Revolution imposed, as well as the language which expressed them, were subsequently used to interpret *à rebours* the French Revolution itself. The upshot was the notion of a Revolution which, as the midwife of 'modernity', was contextualized and conceived using the very modernity which it had generated. There is no book, Robespierre used to say, which gives instructions for revolution. The theory of revolutionary government would therefore be without precedent and drawn entirely from the 'new' Enlightenment philosophy which, if not invented by the Revolution, was certainly reinterpreted through its prism.

These ideas long enjoyed a hegemony which at a certain point came to be unchallenged. Nowadays, a more balanced approach would be to consider the revolutionary period 1789–1802 as an extraordinary crucible in which events were not only the product of the new which was advancing, and of the types of resistance which it provoked, but also of an original combination of old practices and necessary innovations, of new ideas and of old concepts and – as we would now say – of identity fervour, of reinvention of tradition and of the public use of history.

This perspective, which gives due importance to symbolic representations and to the formation of identity, appears to be equally productive when applied to analysing conflict in the period on which the Revolution foisted the name of ancient regime: this enables us not only to avoid the misused and crude opposition of revolts 'driven by tradition, desperation or disillusionment' and revolutions 'guided by ideology and hope',[28] but also to think in a new, and perhaps more fruitful, way about the processes of 'inventing the enemy',[29] about the 'conspiracy

obsession'[30] and about the construction of the 'memorial legacy',[31] which all left a mark on numerous historical events of the early modern period.

3 Revolutions before 'the Revolution'

It may be interesting to continue the comparison of the trajectory of recent research on the French Revolution with research on the crucial period in English history which was long called the 'Civil War' and which has resumed the name, at times with a certain ambiguity, of the English Revolution which, in the years of revisionist domination, was shunned by the most prestigious research centres, such as London's Institute of Historical Research, and found itself relegated to lacklustre departments of cultural studies in provincial universities. The name has now regained acceptance.

This is the most telling signal that the progressive erosion of revisionist theories[32] brought about a significant change in historiographical circles in which there was a re-emergence of the subject of the power of competing ideas, and of the diversity of contending views, especially religious views.[33] Even the attempt by one of the most passionate combatants in the revisionist battle to relaunch the subject of the so-called 'noble revolt',[34] that is, the disaffection of the aristocratic élites in the crucial period 1640–2, no longer claims that it was the only force moving events but that it is only one important element which is compatible with contemporaneous and later processes of radicalization and which, above all, casts a shadow over revisionist descriptions of England in the 1620s and 1630s as an orderly and deferential country which was politically cohesive and ideologically united.

In a word, revolution has resumed its place in the field of seventeenth-century British history[35] but this is not, except in very few cases, the re-emergence of the old Whig[36] or Marxist outlook,[37] but the result of a new way of viewing things. What had been gaining ground was a broader notion of what politics is, which was less focused on governmental,[38] institutional and decision-making processes and directed rather at exploring the symbolic force of actions, at the production and reception of communicated meanings, at the use of history[39] and of memory in the creation of social groups.[40]

Above all, with the end of the period of controversy over the major or minor causes of the revolution, attention progressively turned to what has been called the radical imagination,[41] that is, the cultural processes which created the sectarian environment in the years preceding the Civil War, and the subsequent process of radicalization to which it was subjected during the period of open conflict.[42] The result has been important research into the ideological background of groups inspired by antinomian doctrines,[43] into the clashes between the sectarian world and the Anglican Church,[44] the definition of enthusiasm,[45] and on the contiguities and divergences of the numerous groups of godly people, that is, the sectarian militants.[46] These approaches eroded revisionist convictions about Puritanism, which had been depicted as basically hierarchical, unitary and of conservative

inspiration, but they did not thereby mark a return to the framework created by Christopher Hill, with its stress on the link between religious radicalism and popular initiative, and its attention to those whom he called the middling sort of people who, somewhat inappropriately, were called upon to fill the role of a revolutionary bourgeoisie which it was not at all easy to track down. With the overturning of entrenched convictions, even the world of cultural radicalism, which was re-examined anew,[47] nowadays no longer seems so much the expression of particular social groups as, if anything, their matrix.

This new cultural phase was complemented, as was inevitable, by a broadening of the documentary material placed under scrutiny: such material was no longer restricted to manuscript sources, which traditionalists considered the sole depositories of 'genuine facts',[48] but was extended to a range of printed sources (squibs,[49] pamphlets, news books[50]), to images and literary texts.[51] With this broader outlook came a greater intellectual attentiveness which challenged the traditional empirical mindset and urged that greater thought be given to the categories of historiographical work and to the constraints which it imposes, that is, to a realization that even 'common sense' distinctions, such as 'social' as opposed to 'political', are themselves constructs and representations.[52]

However, recent work on the English Revolution has not only challenged the traditional historiographical empiricism, but has no less vigorously questioned the equally traditional Anglocentrism. On the basis of an approach put forward by J. G. A. Pocock,[53] and in the wake of Conrad Russell's recasting of the historiography of the 'multiple reigns' and the 'composite monarchies', the 'English Civil War' has been extended to Scotland and Ireland, and has become, variously, 'the British Revolution',[54] the 'British war of religion' and also even 'the war of three nations' (which, if one includes Wales, becomes 'of four nations'). The broadening of the range of interpretation produced by the outpouring of 'new British histories' in recent years has considerably altered the panorama, but has not entirely dissipated the paradigm of English insularism which, when extended to a British dimension, has now come to characterize an archipelago and has thus given rise to 'British exceptionalism'.[55]

In fact, notwithstanding the recent attempt to situate 'England's troubles' not only in a British context but also in a Continental political, diplomatic and military one,[56] comparison with the European situation is generally avoided. A long time has passed since historians talked about a 'general crisis of the seventeenth century', and nowadays the openly ideological reasons which then encouraged them in that direction are perfectly evident.[57] However, what does remain virtually absent is a comparison of the English (or, if you will, British) crisis with events which, in the same period, were troubling European monarchies in Barcelona, Naples and Paris, some of them just as composite as the Stuart monarchy.

An obvious example of this undervaluation of the comparative method is the flowering of research on war papers, that is, the propaganda struggle to control opinion in the period of formation of a nascent public sphere which is certainly one of the most fruitful fields of research to have developed in the recent years.[58]

However, what is particularly striking about these studies is their limited use of a comparative approach, despite the fact that Habermas' model for the creation of the public sphere, on which these studies drew, explicitly postulated the need for just such an approach (and its concomitant series of problems) which was not heeded. There have been penetrating observations on its applicability to the English case – at first on the dating of the creation of a public sphere and later on the lack of realism in describing it as an arena of rational discussion among equals[59] – but what has generally been ignored is the possibility of linking this with similar, earlier or contemporary processes in Europe.[60] The study of pamphlets has acquired significant methodological sophistication,[61] but almost no mention is made either of the veritable outpouring of political writings known as *Mazarinades* during the *Fronde*, or to the extraordinary story of the Dutch press in the decades of the war of independence from Spanish rule. The basic and fundamental point is not to show that an inchoate form of public opinion came into being through such events, but to observe that revolutions are actually characterized by the processes of broadening political communication, by the spread of opinions critical of the establishment, and by the creation of a temporary, embryonic, but nevertheless real, public sphere.

Another area of study which could benefit from a comparative, European approach concerns popular political initiatives,[62] and the forms of violent conflict arising from them.[63] Here too, indeed here especially, one finds the recurrence throughout Europe of types of protest and action, of shared cultural outlooks, and of common themes such as the critique and rejection of what Richard Bonney called extraordinary government.[64]

For such a comparison to be possible, one must obviously present the 'six contemporary revolutions' in the seventeenth century in the light of all the knowledge that we now possess, and free from the conditioning which defined (and deformed) their image. The two most blatant examples of such conditioning are probably the *Fronde* and the Neapolitan revolt of 1647–8, that is, the revolt of Masaniello,[65] and perhaps these two offer the best chance of restoring complexity to the significant factors which were actually at work.[66] It is strange how laborious and slow is the process by which historiography is ridding itself of prejudices which see the *Fronde* as a 'tragic farce',[67] and events in Naples as an extreme case of plebeian riots without rhyme or reason.[68] These are fundamentally value judgements which discriminate on the basis of an old model of revolution which, despite being irremediably dated, still allows respected scholars to define the *Fronde* as a retrograde and reactionary movement,[69] and the events in Naples as a 'convulsion of historically jeopardized forces'.[70] Nowadays such a concept of modernity is judged to be simplistic and schematic, and it may be possible to jettison similar judgements.[71] Instead of being trapped in this game of definitions based on value-laden polarities, it is possible to show – by giving due importance to the symbolic representation and to the processual formation of identities – that, both in Naples and Paris, there occurred significant cases of ideological radicalization, of propaganda battles waged through books and pamphlets, of violent popular violence and of collective resistance.

4 Conclusions: revolutions and public memory

The concept of revolution was the fundamental way in which modern culture read and interpreted political, economic and social conflict by seeing them as forming part of the unilinear and irresistible movement of the universal advance of civilization. The question then arises: how are revolutions to be reconsidered in today's cultural context in which this viewpoint has been progressively abandoned or seriously questioned? Revolutionary historical events, once categorized as necessary stages on the path to evolution and progress, risk becoming insignificant now that we have lost sight of the idea of such a path. The positive effect of doing away with the artificial distinctions which often counterpoised, on ideological grounds, revolutions to rebellions, to *coups d'état* and to civil wars, has been offset by the risks of no longer possessing the appropriate criteria which they provided by a model which no longer exists. In other words, stripping revolutions of both their mythic and poetic status and of their characteristic feature as being foundational and sacralizing events, which historiography complaisantly helped to create and which critical historiographical work then proceeded to deconstruct, does not improve the situation. There are two factors at work: first, historians, favoured by the 'cooling down' of the subject of revolutions, have been able, time and again, to dismantle their numerous aspects and to show that they cannot be reduced to a straightforward and predetermined explanatory mechanism; second, in the present cultural climate, marked by the massive onslaught of television drama and by the dominant role of the media with their infinite technical possibilities of recreating the past, revolutions are constantly used as hooks on which to hang stories and as crucial points of reference in the confused mental landscape of the collective imagination. Revolutions are now perhaps less constrained by predetermined rhetoric, and freed from the educational purposes which they once served and which guaranteed their intelligibility.

The result is that revolutions, deprived of their place in a model which established their role and their evolution, and which served to justify the pain and horror which they caused, continue to exist as media vortices which suck in and incorporate anything and which are able to satisfy all kinds of curiosity with their sham backdrops for endless variations of dramas 'based on historical events'. Moreover, the intrusion of so-called historical memory means that preference is given to the subjective, emotional and experiential aspects of individuals and groups. For Furet later in his life, revolutionary time was exceptional, marked by the explosion of the passions and frenzies of an ideological climate,[72] and thus counterpoised to ordinary time, which is mired in the prosaic dialectic of expedience. The new historiography of emotions addresses the phenomenon of revolution with new questions and completely new intentions.[73] Attention is now focused on the emotional contents, which are linked to a traumatic event and which are no longer explored by using the usual chains of causality but by means of analogy, which is able to create a direct link with other similar events and, in the final analysis, with present-day dramas.

In this way, historical reconstructions, concentrated on emotive and subjective aspects, are proposed which aim to establish, between the past and the present, new and comprehensible meanings. These seem to rely less on the possibilities of logical elucidation than on a kind of direct and empathetic understanding based on immersion in *Erlebnis*, a lived experience which is presumed to provide the key to individual and collective existence. In an era 'obsessed with memory', revolutions also become giant receptacles of public memory which are available for a new and diverse range of public uses.

Moreover, if the loss of a constrictive and necessary logic liberates revolutions from their celebratory functions and their ballast of imposed, and superimposed, rhetoric, this relatively greater freedom of outlook risks being nullified by a new, implicit hierarchy of relevance imposed by the model of 'memorialized' history. We are speaking here of a simplifying logic directed at the reproduction and reiteration of a triadic model based on counterpoising the executor and the victim and on giving particular value to the testimony which makes accessible the necessary identification with the violence experienced during a traumatic event. Above all it is trauma which enables identification and a profound understanding of the lived experience. Moreover, those events which can be represented in this guise acquire, for the media, special status and so condition historiographical work. A new, implicit hierarchy of emotion-based relevance is established on the basis of a conception which determines what is essential: emotions are postulated as being naturally given in a naturalistic and substantially non-historical configuration. Above all, there is the risk of weakening the nexus between the entity of the conflict and the development of ideological conceptions which relate to the struggle for freedom and democracy.

Critical historiography can only redeploy the strategy once used to counter the self-celebratory claims of a nation-state, of a class or of the various movements, some religious, which have attempted to use history for purposes of legitimation. Thus critical historiography has two tasks: to testify that the past cannot be employed for whatever use the present may choose for it by distinguishing between what can be said and what must be relegated to the phantasmagorical world of fiction, and to restore complexity to our view of those crucial events in the past which we call revolutions. Once historical revolutions cease to be treated as epic poems and are viewed as tragedies, even if coloured in hopes, they are again, but in a different way, forced into serving the requirements of the present. Historians have the heavy responsibility not only to defend the irreducibility of revolutions to attempts to assimilate them to present-day categories and concerns, with the anachronistic distortions which inevitably follow, but also to put forward a current interpretation of them which is able to shine a critical light on the present.

Notes

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PART II

Rethinking Modernity

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5

IDENTITY

More than two decades ago, the question of identity invaded the orderly garden of the social sciences and wrought havoc on its neat plots. However, at a deeper and more personal level, it also entered our lives. Like an Olympian goddess, descending to earth and bearing with her both the long-prayed-for blessing of consolation and the unforeseen curse of pain and suffering, it traverses through our public sphere as a category midway between scholarly tool and collective experience and between the realm of taxonomy, which enables us to reflect on the world, and *Lebenswelt*, the life-world. It is this unequivocal ambiguity, which, not by chance, makes it both akin to other, now dated, tools for understanding the social (and historical) world, but also makes it a fundamental means of access to the contemporary period which is characterized by the 'liquefaction' and 'pulverization' of the modern, or even by a second modernity, new and distinct from classic modernity.[1]

It is by means of the identitary dimension that an attempt has been made in recent decades to find a solution to the intelligibility of the social world which the crisis of ascriptive macro-categories (class, nation, membership by birth of a religious faith) had irremediably cast into confusion. It was again by using the tool of identity that an attempt was made to dismantle and reassemble collective groupings. Hence identity, rather than being a well-defined analytical tool, seems more like a tendency or a given standpoint which is more respectful of the subjective position of the social actors: that is, it is more inclined to acknowledge the autonomy of those who act 'without knowing how things will end up' when compared with the lucid heteronomy – and the facile teleology – of historians, the onetime 'prophets of the future'.

1 There once was a thing called class

In a memorable scene of Aleksandr Sokurov's film *Russian Ark*,[2] two people, each in his way disoriented, one from the eighteenth century and the other from the

present, are wandering thorough the rooms of what was once the Imperial Palace and is now the famous Hermitage Museum in St Petersburg. As they walk down the corridors of the museum and through its exhibition spaces, they come across crowds of tourists congregating in front of small and large masterpieces. The man from the past, puzzled by not recognizing in their manner of dress any of the signs which, in his time, indicated social standing, exclaims: 'Who are these people? What social ranks do they come from?'

Like him, we living now are also puzzled. We look at the social groupings of our time and we can no longer distinguish them clearly. Either the social world has become blurred or else our vision of it has – the result being the same. And yet the twentieth century witnessed what we might call the time of clarity: those few decades of the 'short century' from the First World War to the 1970s experienced an image of an orderly world organized in such a way that reality and its representation closely corresponded.[3]

The idea of nation still enjoyed undeniable resilience. Thanks to a massive effort at naturalization carried out with a huge expenditure of effort by states, national identity was considered as an essential and undisputed component of the social and historical landscape. Naturally, this was before the advent of regionalisms and of supernational aspirations, of 'imagined communities'[4] and 'invented traditions'[5] that disturbed what may be called the normal order of things and the fundamental way of reading the history of civilization as the history of nations. In other words, national identity, once naturalized, provided a secure mooring for individual subjectivity and a safe haven for collective experience.

Moreover, at the social level at that time, there were models of classification which ordered the world according to the principle that dependence on one type of economic activity created a homogeneous social group with an objective commonality of interests able to become subjectivity, substance and consciousness. This was the idea of class in its various configurations, based either on description (*blue-collar/white-collar*), stratification (*lower-middle-upper class*) or dichotomy (*bourgeoisie–working class*). It was especially the last configuration which provided a political orientation which counterposed the occupation of public space by workers' movements to a bourgeois world imagined as stubbornly entrenched in defence of the 'corridors of power'.

The clarity of that social world was basically due to a short circuit between what was then called class consciousness, class *für sich*, for itself, and the claim of social science to be able to read a class's objective modes of production and reproduction, that is, the so-called class *an sich*, in itself. However, such transparency was due not only to this correspondence between scholarly consensus and social self-awareness but also to the corollary that, once social groupings had been broadly identified at the socio-economic level this made it possible to link more or less closely class membership and political orientation, in keeping with a gradient ranging from Lukácsian determinism,[6] which matched class structure and social consciousness, to early Marxian subjectivist interpretations (often filtered through Gramsci's thinking), that is, to release class analysis from the grip of objectivistic schematisms.

Nowadays this social world and its intellectual mind-set no longer exist. At a social level, by decades, statistics were already showing that in Europe and the USA jobs for workers were shrinking compared with the boom of employment in the services sector.[7] This fact deeply influences the vision of the social world: the industrial working class, and not peasants, not the bourgeoisie, sustained the concept of class: as Asa Briggs clearly perceived, it is the lower class which in some sense enables the concept of the middle class to be created.[8]

Since that time, more and more individuals have joined groupings and have identified themselves according to patterns which no longer attribute the pivotal role to economic factors as a base for their self-perception. In Europe and the USA the vast majority of people could nowadays be described as either being, or potentially being, middle-class. However, this much abused, protean and elusive term no longer connotes individuals politically or implies the choice of a belief system, of special, binding life-choices or of shared values. Groups find self-recognition using different lines of demarcation, such as those opposing one trend or one lifestyle to another; and they set themselves apart according to cultural or religious orientations, ethnic and territorial roots, and associations based on common values. In fact, social differentiation tends to avoid face-to-face relations and to relate directly with the world of communication, the virtual, powerful and pervasive social reality created by new media.

It is not possible here to summarize the complex trajectory of the social sciences which led to the questioning of holistic conceptual frameworks under the impact of methodological individualism and the resulting critical rethinking flowing from the hermeneutic approach. However, the results were that 'class' passed from being overused in scholarly language to almost disappearing and being virtually proscribed. In this context it is difficult to overestimate the importance and profound influence of Pierre Bourdieu's work on distinction,[9] especially for his negative critique that it was possible to think of social groups who identify themselves, and are identifiable, on the basis of differences which are, broadly speaking, cultural or, at any rate, cannot be directly related to a person's standing or to what was once called a person's role in the means of production.

Historical research into the pre-industrial world, seen as the basic counterpart to modernity, has also undergone a corresponding change of perspective. The clarity once emanating from the present naturally also cast light, albeit fainter, on a past which was interpreted and experienced as pre-modern. For Karl Marx it was the class contradiction between workers and bourgeoisie which made sense of the past, which gave direction and enabled all historical class struggles and history itself to be seen as a class struggle.

The result of continuing along this path was to project back onto the past perspectives and analyses framed to understand the present. This was the case with much of Marxist schematism, but also with other tendencies: as may be seen in the influence of American functionalism on a historian of the *ancien régime* as alien from Marxist sympathies as Roland Mousnier.[10]

Given the scant presence of organized displays of class consciousness, class analysis when applied to the pre-industrial world produced a prevalence of interpretative

models based on the presumably objective, and often reified, existence of classes – it was reductionism of this sort that E. P. Thompson so vigorously combatted[11] – or else classes were held to exist regardless of any perceived sense of belonging. This was a kind of attribution from afar by which the historian, taking the place of God, assigned places in the world.

The consequences of this way of reasoning are well known. Given the tendency to make political alignment an offshoot of class membership, fictitious groupings were created which may well have functioned (often tautologically) in the case of the models used by historians but which had the ultimate result of lumping together people from the past who not only would not have imagined themselves as belonging to a front with common politics and values but would not have even welcomed meeting one another. Moreover, it can, and has been, demonstrated that the evident gaps between concrete political alignments which could be documented *ex post* and the hypothetical shared attributes of supposed class fronts were the real source and strength of all successful revisionist readings of revolutions in the modern era.[12]

2 Between radical individualism and representations

Given the crisis of class analysis, what alternative solutions did historical and social analysis offer? There were essentially three solutions.

The first, radically individualistic, is typical of the British empiricism which also underlay revisionist approaches to the first English Revolution: this may be called neo-Namierism. This is an approach which, more or less consciously, by retrieving the individual dimension and by detailed analysis of the play of political interests, aims to dismantle the inapposite generalizations of a progressively oriented history of political institutions. Beneath the distinctive labels of the traditional view of British history – Whigs and Tories, court and country – there was the world of faction and clientship, of methods of negotiation and bargaining which characterized politics, not only in the early modern period. At the same time, new prosopographical techniques were refined which were able to provide a more realistic perspective based on meticulous day-by-day mapping of the play of the ties of patronage and of factional loyalties. This response was clearly unable to redraw an alternative conceptual politico-social world in that, more or less implicitly, and for different reasons and from different viewpoints, it declined to situate social ties and their representations at the core of its analysis.

The upshot was a segmented and fragmented analysis of the process by which decisions were formed which were able to dismantle and cut free improper generalizations based on general methods of classification, but without replacing them with an overview based on theoretical coherence.[13] With a measure of exaggeration, one might say that this perspective is in basic agreement with Mrs Thatcher's memorable utterance: 'You know, there's no such thing as society.'[14]

Parallel to this approach, which almost always involved the analysis of small, closely knit inner circles of political actors, there also developed – in another

context and involving the analysis of other social groups – a mode of analysis which was quite different and which derived from one way of interpreting methodological individualism. Here the dominant idea is of a historic actor considered to be relatively free (that is, unfettered by specific social constraints), and protagonist, both as object and subject, of historical analysis which rejects both generalizations and the incorporation of individuals within already existing models, and which seeks to emphasize the ability of individuals to react and to reject. In Italy this approach influenced a lively period of engaging studies published under its aegis which, taking its name from a series of publications edited by Giovanni Levi and Carlo Ginzburg, was called 'microhistory'.[15]

A second, and different, response to the crisis of class analysis aspired to offer another solution which would be able to react to the unease produced by the mounting sense of anachronism about interpretative approaches which were created without taking into account the *Weltanschauung* of historical actors. This approach took as its guide the universal conceptual classifications and the specific institutions embodying them so as to reflect on a society by using its own terms. Just as in modern times a society of classes developed over time, so pre-modern society, the argument went, was a society made up of orders, of ranks and of privileges.

In some ways this was a return to a holistic approach but using categories which were not the functional and structural categories typifying nineteenth- and twentieth-century social science but organicist categories, permeated by a functionalism which one might call theological, which was characteristic of classical, and specifically, Aristotelian thought.

According to Otto Brunner, language, the world of concepts with which we operate, derives from a specific historical situation, that is, the birth of the modern world, by which our language is still basically conditioned.[16] The world of freedoms and class privileges of the state structured by means of bureaucracy and centralized liberal institutions was initially replaced by a tendentially egalitarian and liberal world of 'subjects of the state' and subsequently by a world planned and dominated by the technocrats of the modern administrative state.

This is not the place to venture into the theme of *Verfassung* vs *Konstitution* debate but there is no doubt that Brunner represents an alternative approach which aims to identify social groups and their juridical and corporative make-up. In other words, he tends to assume what we might call the institutional bond as decisive for individuals. From this derives the preference which the tradition which draws on Brunner's thinking gives to disciplining ideologies and its tendency to reify the systems of classification which European society of the old regime had created.

This was an outlook based on disjunctive thinking which fully expressed the contraposition between state and society, between public and private. Its roots lay in the national-popular historiography typifying Germany in the 1920s and 1930s which debated the prospective of an overall analysis centred on the concepts of *Volk* and *Reich*.[17]

It should be observed *en passant* that it was this dramatic period of history, with the rise and the fall of the Weimar Republic, that, directly or indirectly, witnessed

the creation of a number of the great interpretative models used in the twentieth century to reflect on the past and the present: the names which come to mind are (together with Brunner) those of Ernst Kantorowicz, Norbert Elias, Otto Hintze and Carl Schmitt. Naturally the perspectives of these intellectuals were ideologically quite different as regards their support or rejection of the regime but also, more concretely, their individual choice to continue to live in Germany or to go into exile. However, their perspectives had one element in common: a disinterested attitude towards ideological difference, political competition and social conflict. In the case of Schmitt, we would need to speak of aversion rather than a lack of attention – the unity of the people which gives expression to charismatic leadership, *Führung*, needed to be preserved from the perceived danger of social pluralism.

At a social science level rather than at a strictly historical level, one may suggest a parallel between this tendency and the neo-institutionalist school. For the latter, institutions should not be seen as free arenas where different social and political forces confront, and clash, with one another, but as structured spaces which are able to define roles, values and identities. In the view of James March and Johan Olsen, for example, it is institutions which shape individuals and orient their behaviours: in fact, personal identities result from contact with the various institutions to which individuals have adhered or with which they have had relations of some sort. Hence it is institutions which regulate social change and determine the political order.[18] For jurists and historians of law such an approach had an undeniable appeal as it gave a new relevance to the illustrious tradition of institution-based formalism which analysed institutions essentially under a normative and, so to speak, autopoetic profile which was broadly independent of the individuals who, so to speak, 'occupied' these institutions.

Different in its approach but not dissimilar in its results is the inclination to consider the political and institutional system as a symbolic network regulated by a fundamental, autonomous and self-referential grammar. Hence the frequent option to emphasize the specific organizational logic of traditional societies as a conceptual framework able to create deep and original types of solidarity. Hence also the temptation to substitute the political and governmental system with a linguistic and symbolic order, that is, with a universe of representations providing a structure to social language whose condensation point is its actual lexicon, which reveals the density and scope of a discursive universe.[19] This is a system which is considered as binding and no longer centred on individuals but on linguistic constructs and representations: that is, as a system defined ideologically as composed not of people but of social organisms linked by reciprocal obligations and as a system understood as a natural, germinative matrix from which institutions emerge, as it were, by parthenogenesis.

3 The discovery of identity

There is a third possibility offered by the crisis of classic categories of interpretation and this is provided by the ever greater use of the category of identity, which until

some decades ago was virtually absent from the language of social sciences.[20] There is a clear relationship between this crisis and the growing distancing of 'modern' society (that is, society as nation, as class, as unqualified progress and the like) which derived from the sense of living in a novel and different period which, in our uncertainty as to how to designate it, we call postmodern. Our present period is one in which groups are created and dissolve in ways not predicted by classic social science while, quite without precedent, conflicts arise on the basis of specific issues bearing the strong mark of value judgements. From this emerges an attraction for a possible *a posteriori* analysis of social grouping (and of political alignment) by using the tool of identity which, as has been indicated, pays greater heed both to the social and political position autonomously chosen by social actors and to the study of discourse which defines and regulates their choice of affiliation.

Nowadays, as also in the past, it is clear that a group, while intent on defining and redefining the rules of social bargaining, is also engaged in a particular struggle to achieve recognition, and a social and political presence. There are representations and values regulating collective action which cannot be directly deduced from the category of expediency. There are cases in which the symbolic contention has precedence over the strategic contention or, more exactly, in which the latter finds expression in the only forms which, in a given context, are available for some individuals; and these forms are symbolic, in that they create social identification and recognition, and also generate and regenerate systems of solidarity by which a collective identity is established.

Moreover, adoption of the category of identity is useful in opposing the tendency to turn ideology and its grip into a world apart, that is, as something distinct and anormal which obeys rules of its own. Such a tendency also distinguishes (as did the later thinking of François Furet) ordinary periods, analysable by the usual, normal and brutally utilitarian logic of interests, and special periods, marked by a high level of ideological tension and periods of extreme passion susceptible to the sudden incandescence provoked by the sacred appeal of an ideological message.[21] The upshot of this would be some periods when social existences comfortably sit within the economic and social classifications (broadly in keeping with a Marxian perspective), and others when, mysteriously, passions turn against interest, dissolving and reshaping social groups assailed by uncontrollable and virtually incomprehensible forces.

The identitary approach offers the advantage of a way out of this seemingly irreconcilable clash between passions and interests in that it reminds us that interests themselves need to be acknowledged, and that they can only be acknowledged if they form part of accepted scales of values and of worldviews which confer solidity and stability over time.

Here Michel Foucault's contribution was of great significance. He showed, among other things, that historical discourse does not stand innocently removed from the world of historic actors. Thanks to Foucault, we began to give heed to what historic discourse conceals, to the criteria underlying the presumption of order, and to the exclusive structures which legitimize shared belief in an *episteme*.

Foucault's lesson was that there could not be merely *one* history but, inevitably, *various* conflicting histories, and that this conflict over the legitimation and exclusion of the truth of the past is an integral, not a subsidiary part, of the debate to give things a name and things a form, to propose a specific meaning for social reality, and to impose a certain view of the world. It is by assuming these responsibilities and by the subsequent vigorous confrontation with authoritative traditions that there emerges the critical and deconstructive thought which has left its mark on history over the last three decades: in this sphere identity has progressively emerged as a way of escaping the pitfalls of a deceptively transparent world.

However, the introduction of this category served not only to dismantle the contraposition between the normal world of interests and the world of explosive ideological passions,[22] but played an important part in critically scrutinizing the inclination to think that there are two distinct, counterposed societies, each requiring to be studied on its own terms: the order-based society of the old regime on the one hand and the class-based society on the other.

An example to how this identitary perspective contributed to transcending this analytical contraposition may be seen by the change in outlook regarding what may be considered the mother of all classes, the English working class. The debate, which began in 1980 in a famous editorial in *History Workshop* and continued in *Social History*, in the following decade fused with a series of contributions which, while aligned with E. P. Thompson's approach,[23] went far beyond his own thinking and intentions.[24]

The debate, centring on the deconstruction of the English working class conceived of as a cohesive and unitary social class, sprang from the analysis of conflicting discourses and questioned the notion of the industrial revolution as a dramatic, disruptive event which shaped an entire society. In keeping with the greater emphasis now placed on new technologies there was further an insistence on the continuity of popular radicalism, seen as segmented into various regional and cultural areas: such insistence extended even to considering socialism as a cultural superfetation. This matched a questionable attempt to seek the 'soul of the people', upon which ideological grids were overlaid: whereas class ideology was previously seen as deriving directly from a social condition, it was now actually perceived as a bureaucratic imposition emanating from above and outside. Whatever judgement may now be passed on that period of debate, it nevertheless seems to show that the identitary approach enables a different way of understanding the creation and evolution of classes. The starting point was again the analysis of discourses defining the social being but now examining them for their diversity rather than their uniformity: attention was focused on the conflicting discourses which were used by different groups to assert alternative worldviews.

4 New types of subjectivity

The need for a concept which would help to understand the new forms of social aggregation in the latter part of the twentieth century is closely connected with the

rise of new political and social subjectivities which shatter the great ascriptive macro-categories of nation, class and belief; these super categories had become naturalized, had entered common thinking and hence laid claim to assign individuals with a fixed and unchangeable place in the world. It is not fortuitous that the concept of identity was being shaped in the period around 1968, the year when the outbreak of the student revolt jettisoned earlier patterns. In fact, the notion of identity initially emerged from thinking about the 'identity crisis' of youth.[25] Being young is an ascriptive characteristic but, as we shall see,[26] the emergence of specific cultural trends points to a plasticity of the social world in which forms of affiliation are modified in unprecedented ways determined by cultural factors. These involve new ways of experiencing affiliation which break free from national determinism – youth subculture decidedly assumed transnational features; and from class determinism – the student movements of the 1960s ignored class divisions.

In this context, which by no means 'explains' the emergence of identitary discourse in the social sciences but which undoubtedly 'accompanies' it, an important role was played by feminist thinking. As early as 1949 Simone de Beauvoir, in her epoch-making book *Le deuxième sexe*, had argued that sexual identification should not be considered a mere biological fact but a cultural construct: in her famous words 'one is not born but rather becomes a woman'.[27] Children of both sexes share much in common and are more similar than dissimilar to one another; later in life, during their coming to adulthood, the dominant attitude to the sexual division of roles imposes itself, constraining women to conform to a socially accepted and determined role. Beauvoir's culture-based position, typical of existentialist culture, would later be assumed by the American feminist movement which, in opposition to the notion of the biological determinism of sex, or rather of sexual differentiation, coined the antithetical term, *gender*, indicating a kind of 'social interpretation of sex'. Joan Wallach Scott, in her influential article on the subject, defined gender as an element constitutive of social relations which is based on perceived differences between the sexes.[28] Relations between the sexes, far from being a fact of nature, need to be defined in cultural terms as power relations upholding male supremacy.

An important area of study resulted which maintained gender difference as one of the polarities on which social control is based and thus forms part of the triangle of oppression: class, race and gender. However, even this approach was eventually challenged within the movement of feminist inspiration because it was held to be itself vitiated by reproposing a sort of essentialism which reified an identity presumed to be common to women: this was a danger against which Scott herself and, even more vigorously, Judith Butler warned.[29] The latter launched a broadside against understanding gender as *something* which is received, not chosen: instead she insisted on the need to restore individuals with the freedom to move within cultural, social and political intersections without pre-defined constriction. In keeping with 'LGBQT studies' (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Queer, Transgender/Transsexual), Butler pays special attention to the 'political' aspect of gender identity, with particular emphasis on one way of considering gender identity – identity politics – that is, a

form of political mobilization dependent on group affiliation and hence determined by ascriptive characteristics which typify women as gendered subjects. Whereas 'gender cores' exist, that is, coherent clusters of masculinity and femininity, they are not themselves reality but are means of navigating reality. In real life, male and female elements mingle and blend inside and outside individuals. In short, the attempt to define woman within a gender context needs to be seen as another way of reifying her.[30]

More recently, 'identity politics' has also come under attack from an influential economist, Amartya Sen, who pointed out the 'communitarian' aspect underlying the subject of 'identity politics' threatens to fragment a political community and to transform it into a federation of differing identities.[31] For Sen, democracy can only work if all citizens relate directly – that is, without community mediation – to the political system and to the rights which it upholds. Above all, community mediation risks reproposing an ascriptive bond which, even when it is not clearly oppressive, nevertheless appears to limit an individual's inviolable freedom of choice.

Moreover, recent issues in Western societies, such as those to do with the public display of religious symbols, have raised a debate on the possibility of leaving the way open for individuals to choose to be defined by more than one affiliation.[32] Despite recurrent attempts to reify identity and to skew it in keeping with different political needs, it reveals itself to be an elastic concept which resists hypostatization. It repeatedly calls into play the subjectivity and freedom of the individual's choice, and it is this which displays both its weakness and its strength.[33]

5 The modernity we have lost

The entry of the concept of identity into the realm of history and contemporary social sciences presents numerous facets which here it is impossible to summarize in a few words. It is equally difficult and complex to provide reasons for its entry. The term has even taken on a controversial overtone linked to the tensions at work in our ever more globalized world:[34] 'Your Christ is a Jew. Your car is Japanese. Your pizza is Italian. Your democracy – Greek. Your coffee – Brazilian. Your holiday – Turkish. Your numbers – Arabic. Your letters – Latin. Only your neighbour is a foreigner.' These are words on a poster displayed on the walls of Berlin in 1994 which are cited by the father of contemporary sociology,[35] Zygmunt Bauman, and used to stand for his personal view of identity. In recent years, in a series of widely read books,[36] Bauman has set himself the task of explaining and interpreting the current prodigious rise of identity, employing it to provide a powerful, closely argued and accessible way of viewing the world. His viewpoint therefore lends itself well to exploring the potentialities as well as the limitations of the concept of identity.

In referring to the poster mentioned above, Bauman offers an initial response: the identitary theme is nowadays problematic because of the disruptive effects of globalization. He maintains that it is the powerful forces of globalization which rapidly modify once familiar social landscapes, erode our sense of security and

jumble individuals together, fragmenting their social identities. Hence, the identitary question is substantially the product of a period of exceptional uncertainty: 'The future has always been uncertain, but its capriciousness and volatility have never felt so intractable as they do in the liquid modern world of "flexible" labour, frail human bonds, fluid moods, floating threats and an unstoppable cavalcade of chameleon-like dangers.'[37]

However, in Bauman's thinking, this initial answer needs to be completed with a second, parallel and complementary observation: nowadays the identitary question arises with all the force and urgency which are manifested essentially by the crisis of the nation-state. Bauman here alludes to a passage drawn from a text by the sociologist of Polish culture, Monika Kostera: once upon a time Polish school children were taught to answer the question 'who are you?' with the stock phrase 'a little Pole' and to answer the second question 'what is your sign?' with the stentorian assertion 'White Eagle'. Nowadays, the same child, by now an adult, when asked the same two questions would probably reply to the first 'a handsome man in his forties, with a sense of humour', and to the second with 'Gemini'. As Bauman notes, it is the weakened hold of the idea of the nation-state which gives the identitary question the centrality that it nowadays occupies.[38]

However, the two responses – incipient globalization and the weakened hold of the nation-state – are fundamentally the same, as in recent decades globalization has meant that the state has progressively withdrawn from the 'world of life', as it no longer has the strength or the will to maintain control or, as Bauman wittily observes, to continue with its 'marriage with the nation'.[39]

Hence, the cluster of problems known as the rise of the 'identitary syndrome' is resolved by being relayed to a question which is no less complex than the crisis of the nation-state. A dynamic designated by a term, identity, which in itself is rightfully considered ambiguous and polysemic, is resolved as being the derivative and the consequence of a process known, in terms no less elusive and even more ambiguous, as globalization.[40]

For Bauman, the question of identity arises when an individual is in contact with so-called 'communities of ideas and principles', whereas the question does not even arise so long as the individual remains in 'communities of life and fate'. The distinction in terms was originally proposed by Siegfried Kracauer,[41] who, with the latter expression, indicated social groups whose members 'live together in an indissoluble attachment', that is, face to face and in close sociality; on the other hand, the former expression indicates social groups which are exclusively linked by ideas and principles, that is, at an ideological level. In other words, the problem of identity does not present itself so long as one is firmly anchored, or better, immersed, in the 'world of life'. Hence identity is not a natural offshoot of human experience but a fiction, that is, a construct which is *geistig*, that is, both spiritual and intellectual, and which is superimposed on the natural world of life. For a long time the artificiality of identity was concealed in an attempt to protect its supposedly ascriptive nature. Nowadays the difference lies in the fact that the process of naturalizing the construct of identity, which was carried out by powerful social

agents, above all by the state, has ceased. Identity now reveals, or rather ceases to conceal, its artificial nature, and individuals now find themselves holding in their hands something which is fragile and perennially temporary, something which needs inventing rather than discovering.

Such an interpretative approach obviously rests on the conviction, which to historians seems either too generic or decidedly *naif*, that for most of human history social relations have been firmly limited by physical proximity.[42] This is to relaunch what has been a sort of perennial topos underlying sociology, as the study of social change, from its very beginnings: the tendency to contrapose *traditional* societies, understood as microcosms in which networks of individual relationships are conceived as being limited to a restricted area, to *modern* societies characterized by the slow erosion and the loss of authority of local communities accompanied by the growth of forms of communication and by the revolutionary change in means of transport.[43] We will return to this traditional/modern polarization with its myriad corollaries (static/mobile; mutually supportive/anomic; natural/artificial and so on) but at this point we need to stress that for Bauman the introduction of the identitary dynamic is an artifice of the modern, specifically of the process usually known as *state-building/nation-building*:

> Unlike the 'mini-societies of mutual familiarity', those localities in which the lives of most men and women of the premodern and premobility times were spent from cradle to grave, 'nation' was an imagined entity that could enter the *Lebenswelt* only if mediated by the artifice of a concept.[44]

When he considers the creation of 'communities of ideas and principles' which convey the identitary dynamic, Bauman is referring above all to the enormous expenditure of coercion and persuasion needed so that the state could present itself as the fulfilment of a nation's destiny, and as an earnest of its continued existence. Such a state in its heroic phase was a state as it should be, a Hegelian state, one might say, committed both to bridging the inevitable gap between what should be and what is, to giving reality to the parameters fixed by the idea, and to reshape reality in the guise of the idea.

Thanks to this massive investment into artificially recreating affiliation and into asserting its exclusive right to delineate, strengthen and safeguard the controversial boundary separating 'us' from 'them', the state constructs an exclusive, naturalized identity which does not tolerate competition, let alone opposition. Drawing on Giorgio Agamben,[45] Bauman observes that national identity has never been like other identities in that it, more than other identities and markedly more than class, calls for unbound devotion and unprecedented loyalty.[46]

The obvious result of this line of interpretation is the overestimation of the uniqueness of national identity: at the risk of being banal, one might note that religions, and particularly monotheistic religions, have been (and are) second to none when it comes to proclaiming and claiming exclusivism: 'thou shalt have no other gods before me'.

One might also add that the idea of an absolute identification between individual and nation is to be found only in the propaganda of totalitarian regimes. It is curious that Bauman on this trajectory finds himself very close to the attack launched in the 1930s by Carl Schmitt against plural affiliations and the theory used to justify and defend this plurality, the pluralism of thinkers such as Harold Laski.

Surprisingly, Bauman does not seem interested in exploring the process of naturalization by which a correspondence was created between birth and belonging to a nation. He recalls the phrase *cuius regio eius natio* – an eighteenth-nineteenth-century reworking of the famous phrase *cuius regio eius religio* established at the Peace of Augsburg (1555) – but reveals a strange and unexpected lack of interest in the existence of two distinct models of birth and national affiliation,[47] the German model of a people rooted in *Boden und Blut*, in earth and blood, and the French model with its greater complexity in defining the nation and in the ability to integrate foreigners.[48]

Once the absence of genuine identity in the pre-modern world is ascertained and its emergence is traced to the golden and 'solid' period and to the rise at that time of the nation-state, it is clear that present-day problems derive from the revelation of the artifice underlying the naturalization of national identity and hence of the conventional nature of its equivalence with its own birth. The jettisoning of this fiction made way for the arduous tasks of identitary creation: the job of identification thus fell on the shoulders of individuals and thus became self-identification.[49]

In Bauman's writings one detects a lurking regret for the time of 'solidity' when national identity was defined ascriptively. The groups which individuals now seek to discover and indeed to create are invariably weak and ragged when compared with traditional and 'solid' types of sociality, and are small, virtual entities which are easy to join and equally easy to abandon.

In short, for Bauman the national state was able, by means of an artifice, to restore to individuals a surrogate of what the coming of modernity had deprived them of, that is, communities of mutual familiarity, and this surrogate, albeit far from impressive, was, by being naturalized, a 'solid' identity. Now that identity is being eroded, all that we have left is virtuality, that is, an illusion of intimacy and a fiction of community.

6 The liquified world

The contemporary world, the final, weary phase of the modern era, is therefore characterized by Bauman in the widely used metaphor that he calls *liquidity*, a synonym for disintegration and speed, for flexibility and uncertainty, for decomposition and angst.[50] In terms of identity, this brings the obligation to seek, build and hold together the varied identitary reference points that have taken the place of the once unique national identity. The fundamental characteristic of identity in present times, its plural nature, actually derives from the diverse and conflicting 'communities of ideas and principles' with which we come into contact in our lives: with the natural difference that, whereas national identity was presumed to be

ascriptive in nature and non-negotiable, contemporary plural identities are suited to a world made up of fleeting opportunities and a lack of stability.

In the world of liquid modernity, the popular hero is the individual who can fluctuate without hindrance, the mutant, the man in a perennial state of change, Ibsen's Peer Gynt who rejects a fixed identity and wants to halt time, moving about without limitations and dancing without reservations.[51] Once again, the apocalyptic tones with which Bauman describes 'liquid' modernity as an illness of capitalism's dotage are striking. Because of this it becomes impossible for the individual, finding himself launched into a never-ending motion – a motion that was once an achievement or a privilege and is now a 'must' – to escape from the curse of *falsche Bewegung*, false motion, that act of spinning around in circles that prevents the individual from finding the key to the problem, stable security. What individuals basically sought was to sit around a table together, have face-to-face contact and a real conversation, a style of community behaviour which was swept away by a tide of consumerism and rampant individualism. In place of this, plural identities serve as 'cloakroom communities' to be used as needed and dispensed with straight away:

> if we talk compulsively about networks and try obsessively to conjure them (or at least their phantoms) out of 'speed dating' and magic incantations of mobile telephone 'messaging', it is because we painfully miss the safety nets which the true network of kinship, friends and brothers-in-fate used to provide matter-of-factly, with or without our efforts. Mobile-telephone directories stand for the missing community and the hope is that they will deputize for the missing intimacy; they are expected to carry a load of expectations they lack the strength to lift, let alone to hold.[52]

What is striking about this description from Bauman of the world of so-called liquid modernity, which constantly grieves for the loss of the welfare state and desperately seeks roots, kinship, friendship and love, is not only the already mentioned tone of nostalgia for the period when the ethical state directed planning, but especially the fact that it retraces the classic nineteenth- and twentieth-century sociological critique launched by Ferdinand Tönnies and by Émile Durkheim. It even seems that the world of liquid modernity outlined here corresponds curiously with the scenario of modernity *tout court* that classical sociologists would define as the time of *Gesellschaft*, a disorganized and individualistic society that supplants the *Gemeinschaft*, a mutually supportive, value-based community. With regard to this, it should not be forgotten that Georg Simmel, an influential predecessor of Bauman, published a brief essay in 1903 on *The Metropolis and Mental Life* that appears in many aspects to be a close progenitor of Bauman's thesis.[53] In Simmel's essay, the perverse effect of modernity was made clear: the production of an individual, the *blasé*, who is incapable of finding roots in an artificial, frenetic world awash with stimuli, who is thereby reduced into sinking into apathy and indifference.

The fact that, despite Bauman's denials,[54] the discomfort with modernity which was exhibited at the time of the *Belle époque* and the parallel discomfort expressed in the

contemporary world (in the transition from 'solid modernity' to 'light capitalism')[55] look alike is perplexing; and it becomes disconcerting if the political consequences that derive from this analysis are examined. The first of these consequences is longing, lightly masked, for a state which is *dirigiste* even in ethical questions:

> With the political state programmatically neutral and indifferent to the 'cottage industry' of identities, and abstaining from passing a judgement on the relative values of cultural choices and from promoting a shared model of togetherness, there are few if any shared values to hold society together.[56]

Moreover there is a tendency to reduce the American model to a caricature which acts as a response to this melancholy point of view: an American way of life that is represented as characterized by the absence of any shared way of life and, consequently, to a recurrent tendency to moral panic and collective paranoia. A bleak characterization has been proposed of the Americans as anomic individuals, protective of their own privacy and suspicious of the outside world, constantly seeking common enemies on which to vent the rage caused by the angst and frustration which accumulate in the inane effort to patch together some form of identity.

Readers can shift from bewilderment to dejection on hearing multiculturalism and relativism defined, time and again, as the effect of the diffusion on a global scale of the American model; as the taking of a position rejecting all responsibility regarding the recurring quarrels on ways of life or important values; as a miserly refusal to pass judgement or take a stand; and more generally as a proclamation of indifference from the new global élite. This intellectual élite is light-years removed from the life of common people, from their aspirations and their experiences. It is a ruling class which, above all, has abandoned its historical mission:[57]

> From the advent of the modern state, the educated elite saw itself (rightly or wrongly, for better or worse) as the avant-garde, the advanced units of the nation: we are here to lead the rest of the people to where we have already arrived – others will follow us, and it is our task to make them move quickly. This sense of a collective mission has now been all but abandoned. 'Multiculturalism' is a gloss on that retreat (or an excuse for it).[58]

This point of view evidently entails, yet again, a feeling of nostalgia for an intellectual avant-garde and/or a state which takes on the task of culturally homogenizing a community: this overlooks both the 'questionable methods' by which these processes were conducted in the twentieth century and the results, at times tragic, that they produced.

7 *Simul stabunt, simul cadent*: nation, class and identitary divisions

If we compare the relative attention that Bauman gave to national identity and to class identity, he seems to have a far less pronounced interest in the latter and, at

times, appears to adopt an almost reticent approach. Criticizing Marxian economics or, to put it better, Marxian economist interpretation, did not actually help the illustrious Polish-Jewish sociologist focus better on the formidable task of identitary construction which, in the last two centuries in Europe, accompanied the transformation of millions of citizens into labourers and that of masses of workers into trade unionists, militants and professional revolutionaries of the socialist and then communist movements.[59] This underestimation is rather curious because, according to Bauman's interpretative framework, longing for identity derives, eventually, from a desire for security. However, the trade-union movement, the mutualistic universe of the socialist leagues and of the struggles for rights (despite, or maybe because of, their troubled history)[60] are not given a level of focus that would correspond to this premise. It is as if in the end Bauman renounced to ascribe to class identity the same dignity he recognized in national identity, as if class identity represented a lesser, secondary proposition which was incapable of achieving the same status of established and exclusive meta-identity as national identity. This does an injustice, to say the least, to those many militants of the historical workers' and socialist movement who have, over the course of the last two centuries, prioritized their class identity over their national identity, both repudiating the latter and defining themselves as stateless or global citizens, and who have often suffered the severe consequences of such choices.

The only dimension that Bauman does highlight is the disintegration of the connective fabric of class that once upon a time provided fertile ground for democracy, offering it the conditions needed to put down roots and mature. Bauman observes that today, conversely, any enduring loyalty to groups or organizations is inexorably of marginal, if not simply residual, importance, because it is inappropriate, unsuitable to a time in which inflexibility is condemned and any long-term commitment is seen as ill judged and restricting.

Class, in other words, is not analysed as a possible form (at a given time, in a given place and in specific, established conditions) of collective affiliation that allows for a greater understanding of how identitary dynamics work, but is instead seen as an aspect of the world of 'solid modernity' that, regretfully, we have abandoned.[61]

According to Bauman, the main consequence of the disintegration of class identity is that social discontent is now diffused across an infinite number of protests based on groups or categories of people: the evaporation of the idea of a better world actually led to a notable fragmentation of social dissent, to a multitude of conflicts between various groups and to an increase in battlegrounds. The nearly universal disrepute for the concept of class, with its emphasis on the economic roots of injustice, actually produced a negative reaction from intellectuals, who had once been engaged in some sort of mission to help the less privileged but today are locked in an autistic concern with themselves.

Bauman's work does not provide a discussion of the extensive literature on the repositioning of social conflicts that began in the 1960s (the so-called 'new issue'), nor does it discuss the central role of ideology in the formation of class identity; he prefers to highlight how an ideology of exploitation, now discredited, was replaced

with a new focus on exclusion. Instead of the working class, Bauman today identifies a global 'underclass' with very loosely defined boundaries, made up of undocumented immigrants, refugees, people who are precluded from the choice of self-identification and are obliged to endure the rigid identitary cages imposed on them by others. But if this were actually true, then it would be somewhat improper to complain about the stances found in public opinion (and the intellectual élite) that appear, compared to the past, less sensitive to classic forms of social injustice, and are often accompanied, conversely, by a new, different focus on alienation and on the broad and substantial social universe called 'volunteering'.

However, the key point of Bauman's interpretative proposal on identity is, in fact, otherwise, and is the relationship between national and class identity. Is it not preferable, instead of treating them as fragments of the solid world that we have lost, to analyse them as subjects which each have their own specific rhetoric? Apart from regretting the harmful effects caused by their parallel collapse, is there nothing else to say about the parallels between them? Even without referring to Ernst Nolte or the François Furet of *The Passing of an Illusion*, it seems obvious that the two identitary propositions share a common language and originate in the same culture, which is actually nothing more than the political culture created by the French Revolution.

The weakness of Bauman's decision not to adopt a discursive-centred approach to the analysis of identitary profiles becomes apparent in the pages he dedicates to new religious conflicts and the growth of fundamentalism. We are dealing with phenomena that Bauman consistently attributes to the upheavals caused by globalization and to the loss of security that originated with calling welfare into question and with the crisis of a nation-state that no longer enjoys popular confidence: 'For a sober mind the present spectacular rise of fundamentalisms holds no mystery. It is anything but puzzling or unexpected.'[62] It derives from the experience of abandonment and from the obsession with excluding people that forewarns of the loss of the security of sociability: millions of people abandoned alone 'with no loving heart and helping hand in sight, and badly miss[ing] the warmth, comfort and security of togetherness'.[63] Fundamentalist therapy would then be, in essence, an obvious response to the injustice and anomie of the globalized world.

Bauman's reasoning connects, in this way, a subjective need (triggered by objective forces) for radical identitary formation. But this explanation does not attribute much importance to the concrete political decisions taken by the large organized players (states, multinational companies, potentates, churches, etc.) and their effect on ideological radicalization. Nor does it attribute much importance to the ideological and propaganda-based battle that ceaselessly accompanies every conflict.[64]

Instead Bauman essentially examines subjective choices, he examines the need for security that stems from living in a world that is liquid, variable, and lacking a stable order. Many members of extremist groups, Bauman observes, would have preferred something else to fundamentalist therapy. They would have preferred a stability that did not necessarily entail surrendering their own freedom to choose or their previous identity, but this option, sadly, is seldom available. Compared to a

nerve-racking life, made up of temporary choices in unregulated and unpredictable contexts, fundamentalism has the benefit of offering simple and unquestionable principles and rules on behaviour. In other words, fundamentalist congregations fulfil, at least for the most downtrodden section of many groups of people, the role that the social state can no longer fulfil, that of offering safe anchorage in the perilous sea of global inequality.[65]

This perspective, though striking, has the 'merit' of offering exemption from the endeavour of analysing ideologies and the rhetorical traditions that support and enliven them. One could also ask why it is that the many forms of fundamentalism, whether Christian or Islamic or of some other religion, prospered in historical periods that are so different from each other, some of which certainly did not lack 'communities of life and fate'.[66]

Bauman also extends this same interpretative hypothesis to the national-religious conflicts that flared up in the Balkans in the 1990s. In response to the question as to why the bloodthirsty monster that was the Serbo-Croat-Bosniak conflict was reawoken, Bauman offers us, on closer inspection, again the same answer: there were mechanisms present in the Balkans, no doubt taken to the extreme, similar to those that are in action everywhere, which were attempts to create trenches that mark the boundary between a safe inside and an unsafe outside.[67]

The exclusive nature of national or religious identity is thus separated completely from the rhetorical discourses which serve to distinguish one from the other, without any analysis of the importance of the identification of the other from the self in identitary formation. It is also done without paying attention to the specific elements of that collective typification which influences or orients individual identity and which, amongst other things, also determines the physical reality of conflict and violence.

8 Conclusions: coming to terms with lost innocence

Identitary nature poses problems for the social sciences (and for history amongst them) that cannot be tackled with the solutions that classical social thought provides. The generation of the founding fathers of modern sociology, that of Weber, Durkheim, Schumpeter and Simmel, was searching for other horizons, and clearly had other questions in mind. Today it seems obvious that nations and classes and religions were not (and are not) simply extremely powerful frameworks for identitary recognition, but are also equally powerful interpretative categories. They were systems for governing the world and, at the same time, subjective visions of existence sustained by the certain evidence provided by the processes of naturalization to which these systems gave rise. Their strength and, so to speak, their capacity to function lay (and lies) in this amphibious nature, and therefore it lay also in the validation provided by the disciplines that are socially invested in the task of their creation and maintenance – history and the other social sciences, including sociology.

Hence the problem does not lie in whether to return or not to the founding fathers but in emphasizing the major gap between their thinking and ours: that is,

the realization, typifying the social sciences at times of crisis, that their way of knowing, while being in a sense deontologically defined, does not automatically place them in an epistemologically privileged context. This means, in other words, that social sciences generate a discursive-style knowledge which is not distinct or distinguishable from common knowledge; scholars and the subjects which they confront and analyse are inevitably part of the debate taking place in the public sphere.

Moreover, as has been observed, the social sciences 'are not only concerned with interpreting processes of social change. They also articulate visions of the directions these changes would take'.[68] In a pre-critical phase there is an ideological and utopian (or eschatological) dimension which links the social sciences to discourses aimed at identitary construction and at upholding order or social solidarity. However, even in a critical phase, the most impersonal and value-free nature which the language of the social sciences tends to assume does not entail a return to an outlook which is neutral, scientistic and separate from the actions and worldviews of social (or historical) actors. On the contrary, such disciplines should, as does cutting-edge anthropology, acknowledge that their social role necessarily places them in contact, be it even indirect, with the public sphere and everyday life.

From this standpoint, identity is not only a problem which arises in the *Lebenswelt*, the reappropriation by individuals of the multiplicity of possible selves, as opposed to the inflexibility imposed by *mêmeté*, the identity with oneself over time. Identity is also the most important conceptual and analytical tool which history and the social sciences have developed in recent decades in order to avoid the cul-de-sac of social descriptions created *a priori* and therefore quite unsuitable for interpreting a world which they no longer mirror. Identity as an *a posteriori* acknowledgement of the cohesiveness of social groups has, in fact, revealed itself to be an essential way of avoiding the acritical world of social macro-identities which are ascriptive (or presumed to be such): so it is not merely a problem but also, partially and paradoxically, a solution.

Notes

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6 G. Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, London: Merlin, 1971 (1st edn 1923).

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19 Bartolomé Clavero, *Antidora: antropologia católica de la economia moderna*, Milan: Giuffré, 1991.
20 The entry 'Identity', which was not included in the 1932 edition of the *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*, is to be found under 'Identity, psychosocial' in volume VII of the 1968 edition (Crowell Collier and Macmillan) ed. by Erik H. Erikson, the German psychoanalyst who was Anna Freud's pupil and emigrated to the USA in 1933.
21 F. Furet, *The Passing of an Illusion: The Idea of Communism in the Twentieth Century*, Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1999 (1st edn 1995); this critique is developed in my 'Un secolo allo sbando. Pensare il Novecento secondo François Furet', *Storica*, 4 (1996), pp. 103–26.
22 The fascinating story of the origin of this counterposition is to be found in Albert O. Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism before Its Triumph*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977.
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38 Ibid., p. 27.
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6

POWER

Thinking about power is no easy matter. An initial difficulty is that we are not dealing with a concrete 'thing' but with a word which is difficult to pin down, indicating as it does a series of elusive relationships between, or among, individuals; power is therefore what we rather glibly call a 'category'. However, category not only has a scientific sense but, in the language of everyday use, it has a 'common sense' meaning. Indeed, one is almost tempted to say that power exists above all because of linguistic usage, which is a congery of partial definitions, rough and ready approximations, and pervasive and often confusing images. Those who lived through the period of collective action in the late 1960s and 1970s will recall the slogans which called for power to be given back to the workers – many students, who had never been, and never would be, workers, then identified with the working class. Moreover, other images of power also flit through the mind: the omnipotence of Big Brother, leader of the state of Oceania in Orwell's *1984*, or, in a sense, his mirror image, the mortifying powerlessness of K, trapped in the inscrutable workings of the procedure in Kafka's *The Trial*.

In short, circulating among us are images of power which give a reified notion of it: like an object, power can be held, lost, hidden, won. Power is one of those 'natural language' concepts which penetrate deep into the thinking of historians and social scientists.

Bertrand Russell once proposed a repertory of images with animal figures representing common notions of power: brute force exerted by the military and the police (pigs being led to the abattoir); propaganda (an ass being urged on with a carrot or a stick); education (circus animals performing the routines they are forced to learn); and power in its strictly party-political form (sheep being embarked on a ship where, once the first one is aboard, the others proverbially follow).[1]

The conventional understanding of power is, as we have said, a category grouping together a range of capacities: 'people are, for example, consistently

realistic when they speak of power. It exists. It is there.'[2] It is a thing like gravity or electricity, the existence of which is proved by its effects.

> In our common sense thinking we tend to assume that power can be understood by reference to the nature of its source, that the constitution of the source makes intelligible the capacity to work or act that inheres in it. Different kinds of power are thought to inhere in differently constituted sources.[3]

A second, and equally significant, difficulty in tackling the subject of power arises from the fact that our viewpoint has been altered by the shift away from what may be called the 'modernist perspective' of the social sciences, which had its American counterpart in the 'noble dream' of the quest for certainty, to the epistemological uncertainty inherent in the postmodern outlook.[4] With the demise of the idea that 'verifiable' knowledge referring to stable and identifiable objects, 'things' in a Durkheimian sense, was possible in the non-Popperian disciplines, such as history, anthropology and sociology,[5] attention focused on contingency: the contingency of languages, the contingency of community forms, even the contingency of the self. This new awareness, which dispenses with the most ingenuously realistic forms of power (which grows out of the barrel of a gun, in Mao's famous dictum, or which is seized by knocking down the gates of the Winter Palace, as in the famous sequence of Sergei Eisenstein's *October*), has continued to develop in various directions. In what follows, we will survey some approaches to the category of power in the area of social sciences, and will attempt to draw attention to some of the ways in which this category, so crucial to all our thinking about past and present societies, has been investigated by thinkers.

1 The time of Grand Theories

The academic approach to the subject of power clearly dates from Max Weber's monumental study *Economy and Society* where the distinction was made between *Macht*, which is the power, the ability to achieve one's will in a public action despite the will of others, and *Herrschaft*, legitimate power and domination: 'every genuine form of power relationship implies a minimum of voluntary compliance, that is an interest (based on ulterior motives or genuine acceptance) in obedience'.[6] For Weber, such readiness to obey originates from three kinds of dominance: from belief in the legality of established ordinances, from faith in the sacrality of age-old traditions which are embodied in their present incumbent, or else from an irrational and emotional identification with a charismatic leader.[7] Dominance comes to be represented by a ruling class able to exert 'powers of command' both in the economic and political spheres, and where the two spheres overlap.[8]

Weber represents one possible approach to the subject of power, which takes as its basic point of reference the structuring of the political sphere, that is, the State and the modernization of the State.[9] This is one approach among others. One naturally thinks of Marxism which, in its various forms (from its classic texts to its

thematization by Poulantzas,[10] or the neo-Marxism of the *Monthly Review* and the thinking of Michael Mann[11]), linked its analysis of power to the sum of social and economic relationships which it sees as the uniting factor creating and maintaining both given productive functions and class domination (made possible by the development of the forces of production and by the specific means of appropriating the surplus). Then there is the Italian 'élitiste' school of Vilfredo Pareto, Gaetano Mosca and Roberto Michels, and the introduction of the theme of rulers, who, unlike the ruled, can use the bulk of resources and advanced techniques available to the dominant group; that is, simply put, power.[12]

However, it is in the USA – thanks also to the movement of European intellectuals because of the forced emigration of German-Jewish thinkers – that, after the 1930s, the subject of power generated an impressive quantity of analyses which built on earlier traditions of studies of social stratification, and of analyses of the urban fabric.[13] This was a new and different direction for studies into élites that began in the watershed year 1929 which, in this particular context, was not so much the year of the stock exchange collapse as that of the publication of the fundamental study *Middletown* by the husband and wife team of Robert and Helen Lynd.[14] Their book studied the theme of the hidden, invisible power operating within the social structure: this was later elaborated by using the methods of 'reputation analysis' devised by Floyd Hunter in his study of Atlanta.[15] It was on this tradition that Charles Wright Mills drew, in the aftermath of the New Deal and the Second World War, to shape his classic enquiry into the distribution of income among social classes. In his analysis of white collar workers[16] as in his later work on power élites,[17] the same basic idea of power operated as a scarce commodity, which is the key factor in a zero-sum game in which one player's power is considered as deriving from another player's loss of power. In Mills' thinking, the magic triangle of power lies at the intersection of three dominant élites: the military, the economic and the political. Economic structures and military institutions thus become an integral part of power, which is not seen as synonymous with the State political and party system alone. The decisive element, that is, a group's capacity to maintain control and to prevent other groups from wresting it, is no longer identified merely with the political sphere.[18]

The most influential post-war American sociologist, Talcott Parsons, gave a new direction to the subject of power, especially in his later works. In his critical review of Mills' study of élites, Parsons criticized the theory of power as a zero-sum game in terms of totally exclusive and limiting goals so that if one player wins, another player inevitably loses.[19] In Parsons' opinion, just like the wealth generated by the economic system, power can instead be thought of as a quality generated in expandable quantities by the social system. Unlike Marxist and neo-élitist theories, this quality is made possible by the institutionalized (and hence shared) legitimation which, Weber taught, underlay power. On the other hand, the use of force to gain obedience is a proof of the weakness and unreliability of that legitimation; just as the inability to impose sanctions does not necessarily signify a lack of power.

Talcott Parsons' innovation to Weber's approach was that it stressed the possibility of a group or a party to achieve its own particular interests despite the conflicting dynamics which were created with other interests. Such a result is obtained by the diffusion of reciprocal trust among the players, and by putting trust in a leadership able to harmonize diverse interests.

Power thus ceases to be a prerogative of the subject, be they persons or groups, and becomes instead a property of the system. In what Anthony Giddens slightingly called 'idealistic orthodoxy',[20] the change occurs only in the area of cultural values in that stable, or balanced, social systems are based only symbolically and indirectly on the use of force. Leaving behind the command/obey relationship, Talcott Parsons saw the scene as dominated by the individual/society dichotomy, and power was reinterpreted as acting in common as a social group and as functioning as a generalized means of communication responding to the goals of the collectivity.

The thinker dubbed the German Parsons, Niklas Luhmann, continued along this line with his idea, drawn from an analogy with cybernetics, of a completely regulated social system which, to the benefit of participants, reduces the intolerable complexity of the world by means of selecting a 'sense'. For Luhmann, especially for Luhmann, power is thus a means of communication by which each social subject freely accepts and trials subordinate or superordinate roles. Such roles serve social systems to legitimate themselves by reconnecting with the order of the world, and to motivate those playing the roles and so achieve the minimum integration needed for the survival of the system.[21]

2 The antipositivist reaction

These general theories of power form part of a cultural climate strongly imbued with functionalism and structuralism, and seem based fundamentally on a notion of power as property. From the crucial decade of the 1930s, the reaction of American sociology to such a viewpoint was expressed in an orientation which, given its opposition to those who were questionably denominated élitists, was generically labelled as pluralist. Scholars such as Robert Dahl aimed at defining power as a relatively available opportunity, accessible to virtually everyone, and, by analogy, compatible with the market model put forward by neoclassical liberal theory.[22]

This is fundamentally a viewpoint which, drawing on James Madison and Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*, maintained that, in complex societies, there is a plurality of existing élites, none of which is sufficiently powerful to control all decisions.[23] Between the citizen and the State there would thus extend a network of representative demands and of intermediate organizations advancing specific interests. For Parsons, power was a function of the system whereas for the so-called pluralists it was an individual act of participation in the decision-making process. Hence, power was described as to a large extent transparent and so, in a sense, open to the game of social actors.

A highly significant debate arose among American social scientists about both Hunter's and Mills' hypotheses and also Dahl's: the discussion extended further to

other theoretical positions.[24] Underlying the question of where power should be located, a debate was really taking place about the nature of American democratic society, its ability to redistribute resources and, ultimately, the fairness of its entire social system.

In this debate are echoes, albeit profoundly changed, of the classic debate dating back to the 1930s between pluralistic positions and Schmitt's theory of the absolute nature of politics. In his famous essay of 1927, 'The Concept of the Political',[25] Schmitt, in enunciating his idea of the epistemological autonomy of politics which was founded on the original dichotomy *Freund/Fremde* (friend/alien), signalled his own distance from the pluralistic theories of George D. H. Cole and, in particular, of Harold J. Laski.[26] For Laski, the state is only one form of the associations and unions in which individuals operate and develop innumerable ties of faithfulness and loyalty. In the aftermath of the War, Schmitt's thinking on power was taken up again, in pessimistic terms, by Elias Canetti in his well-known *Crowds and Power*,[27] where he reflected on the condition of power which he saw as emerging from the concepts of grace and condemnation, velocity and secrecy, force and command; his conclusion was the idea of power as persistence with its heroic and tragic embodiment being the survivor.

The names Schmitt and Canetti bring to mind one of the fundamental reasons for the interest at the time in the subject of power and how it degenerates: how was one to understand the basis of the Nazi regime? The other and parallel reason was the growing realization after the late 1950s of the horrors perpetrated by Stalin's regime. What needs to be stressed is the nexus between this growing awareness, which after 1989 became a matter of general knowledge, the blurring of functionalist and structuralist models in the social sciences, and the change which had taken place in how power was perceived. The initial and most resolute assault on the old approach to the concept of power was launched by an anthropologist, Pierre Clastres, with his radical view which liberated the idea of power in primitive societies from the dominance of the State.[28] In such societies, which he called acephalous, power was, in his opinion, immanent in society and not separate and counterposed to it. This idea of community power manifestly diverged from functionalist interpretations which equated power with the maintenance of social order. Instead, primitive societies, defined as anti-State societies, supposedly developed a different model of power which was naked and lacked any coercion, institutions, force and authority except for prestige: power was like the big-man described by Marshall Sahlins, who was a precarious leader who was neither obeyed nor heeded but on whom the distribution of wealth depended.[29]

However, it was British anthropology which dealt the strongest blow to functionalist structuralism (which, incidentally, had in England one of its leading exponents in Alfred R. Radcliffe-Brown). This was essentially due to the Africanists of the Manchester School under the leadership of Max Gluckman, who, to describe African society at the time of *indirect rule*, began to avail themselves of a new analytical tool which focused on the metaphor of the so-called network.[30] This was a means of analysing contacts among individuals which describes their social dealings as

represented by lines joining together points indicating either individuals or groups. In each social area, the frequency and intensity of these lines tell us something about the social relations operating there – and indirectly about how power is exercised.

This concept of the relationship network was later greatly enhanced by analysing the flow of communication, and exerted considerable influence when applied to various other fields, above all to defining norms, to the circulation of goods and services, and to the diffusion of news.[31] An example is Jeremy Boissevain's research into quasi-groups in Sicily and Malta which introduced the category of brokers, professional manipulators of people and information operating in diverse social and cultural systems.[32] In all studies following this approach, which went by the name of network analysis, great significance was given to the manipulative activity of the ego. As we know, the fundamental proposition of network analysis is that each ego manipulates the network of relationships (and its own social role) to achieve its goals. The result is a perspective which highlights the instability of social ties and the variability of political coalitions and hence indicates change as a structural principle and not as a secondary variable. Simultaneously, there results a clear tendency to stress the bi-univocal nature of power relationships, even if they are asymmetric as for example, those between centre and periphery.[33]

The most imitated and the extreme model of the manipulative ego is the entrepreneur described by the anthropologist Frederick Barth in his study of northern Norway, as an individual operating with considerable freedom and adopting strategies of maximalization.[34] With Barth, we reach what is, in a sense, a limit to the construction of power as rooted in the actor, with the obvious result of downplaying or marginalizing not only the elements which give form and content to the transactions (traditions, customs, beliefs) but also, so to speak, extra individual features.

3 Foucault

The crisis of 'modernist' disciplines thus followed a trajectory which, in some ways, ran parallel in anthropology and sociology. As regards the thematization of the concept of power, the trajectory led from an original and almost exclusive identification of power with the State, with the dominant classes, and with the social system, to an analysis of power carried out at the level of individuals and their behaviours.

A similar trajectory can also be traced in the field of history: the crisis of analytic models with a Marxist or an *Annales* slant was succeeded, especially in the sphere of political history, by the resumption of the narrative and biographical dimension, and by a renewed attention to the autonomy of actors from economic and social determinants.[35] Against the generalizations and the teleologism of liberal and Marxist-style ethical and political history, there gained ground a reaction which aimed at recovering the individual dimension and at restoring relevance to the actual interplay of political interests underlying the ideological declarations of the

historical players. This perspective, boosted by robust doses of traditional Anglo-Saxon empiricism, produced a view of the political struggle which was not only event-based but was monadic, atomized and individualized. Those on stage are individuals who, minute after minute, day after day, undertake, for reasons of expedience, sequences of actions, and make choices about power without any clear consistency. Individuals are bearers of specific interests and this obliges us to consider decision-making as a highly fragmented and segmented process.[36]

The English school of political historiography, with its interest in a history of power 'at the top', was one way of reacting to the dominant models of the 1950s and 1960s, but the most important and the most profound changes took place within the great corpus of social history. Traditionally seen as detached from the problem of power which was seen as a political problem (in Trevelyan's dictum, social history is the history of the people with the politics left out), research into social history looked more and more to power as a decisive component, indeed as a litmus test, of social spectrography.

However, even in this case, one should note that, with the crisis of the paradigm of classic social history, there was a parallel transformation resulting from the loss of relevance of the functionalist models. There was a shift from the grand taxonomies and the vast social repertories in the style of Adeline Daumard which were intent on a detailed reconstruction of the identity of the French bourgeoisie,[37] to research inspired by network analysis, by English social history as practised by E. P. Thompson and, in Italy, by micro-historical research. At the centre of this attention for a new kind of social history (or critical social history), there were powerful players who consciously used power as a part of individual or group strategies; the actual results of research were often extremely perspicacious analyses of networks of personal relationships, of factions and of clienteles.

Reconstructing this trajectory, which would describe how social history was freed from the constraints of structuralism and functionalism and embraced new approaches influenced by methodological individualism, goes far beyond the scope of the present book. We will, therefore, limit our attention to the thinking of Michel Foucault and to his decisive role in shaping this trajectory.

It is worth recalling that in one interview Foucault confessed that, in famous books such as *The Birth of the Clinic* and *The History of Madness*, he had basically been writing about power without using the word itself and essentially without 'having this whole area of analysis available'.[38] It is interesting that this unreadiness of Foucault, prior to 1968, to carry out a real examination of the nature of power was clearly linked to the influence of politics. As he writes of the problem of power:

> on the right it was only in terms of the constitution, of sovereignty etc. and thus put in juridical terms; from the point of view of Marxism it was posed in terms of the state apparatuses. No one looked for the way in which it was exercised concretely and in detail, with its specificity, its techniques and its tactics. They were content to denounce the other, the adversary, in polemical

> and generalised ways: power in the Soviet Union was called totalitarian by its opponents and in western capitalism the Marxists denounced it as class domination – the mechanism of power was never examined.[39]

Foucault chose, as we know, to look at power from the very particular viewpoint of knowledge, and to read power as a thought system which becomes a socially legitimized and institutionalized system of control. Foucault gave the name *episteme* (from the Greek *epistomai*, to understand, to consider as ascertained and hence to believe) to the totality of discourses dominating an era. It was therefore decisive to identify the ways by which an *episteme* decides what is really significant, as knowledge and truth, and what is not, and then proceed to find the criteria of inclusion–exclusion. In the case of a historical account, what seemed fundamental was to discover how it tended to hide the codes implicit in assuming an order, that is, the structures of exclusion which legitimize *episteme*. Hence, there is not one official history but a terrain where legitimized histories and excluded histories confront each other.

In the mid-1970s Foucault's centre of interest moved from what he called an archaeology of *episteme* to a genealogy of power as knowledge. Whereas his attention had initially been directed to those behaviours and individuals (the 'mad', the sick, criminals) disqualified by *episteme*, his attention now shifted to power as constitutive of the subject and hence to the complex ways in which power affects all individuals. From this came the discovery that power is neither solely nor essentially coercive but also productive and enabling: the thinking was that, if the sole function of power were repression, then power would indeed be something very fragile. Such a perspective appeared to be critical of the Freudian (and Marxist) dialectic of power as repression/liberation. Faced by a model of sexuality as a natural instinct repressed by authoritarian institutions and the consequent intention to discover the truth about one's repressed desires through a model of liberation, Foucault turned his attention to other questions which aimed to identify how people became subject to a particular kind of sexual experience or how an experience articulates a system of rules and constraints such as to configure subjects of sexuality.

Given this perspective, it follows that power is not something which some have and others undergo, but is a diffused resource which is both tactical and narrative. Power is not something which one possesses but something which one lives as part of the stuff of life. In his lecture of 7 January 1976 at the Collège de France it was from this standpoint that Foucault criticized the economistic conception of power characterizing the classic, juridical theory, that is the Hobbesian conception by which power is a right deriving from a contractual deed by which citizens, in ceding part of their natural right, constitute political authority.[40] Foucault counterposed to this approach a view of power as something which is not exchanged, ceded or resumed but which is exercised and only exists when it is exercised.

In the following week's lecture, 14 January, Foucault posed the problem of dominance and subjection, and strongly contested theories which understand

power as essentially repressive and theories which see it as warlike confrontation (Hegel, Freud, Reich); indeed, inverting Von Clausewitz's celebrated dictum, it was war continued by other means. Foucault instead proposed a programme for analysing power which aimed to investigate the processes of power not at the centre but in local areas, not through intentions and declarations but in actual, implemented forms.[41] His focus is power not as a phenomenon of massive and homogeneous domination over others by an individual, a group or a class; that is, not as something which can be neatly divided among those who have it and those who do not and undergo it, but rather as something which circulates among people, which only functions when it operates like a chain, and which cannot be located precisely or appropriated as if it were a thing (wealth, an asset). It is something which functions, which is exercised through a reticular organization in which individuals act, both undergoing power and exercising it. Therefore, these individuals should not be seen as inert or consenting targets of power and as objects to which power is applied, but as elements connecting power: in a word, people are the conduit of power.

Foucault, rather than orienting his enquiry into power in the direction of the juridical exercise of sovereignty by the State apparatus and by ideologies supporting it, considered that enquiry should be directed to the concrete nature of dominance, the specific forms of subjection, the local arrangements, the strategies deployed and the actual operators. In short, power was to be studied outside the model of Leviathan, and outside the confines of legal sovereignty and the institution of the State, and with particular attention to the techniques and tactics of dominance.

4 Power in social organizations

Despite never actually completing the research programme which he enunciated in 1976, Foucault had considerable influence in repositioning historians' and social scientists' ideas on the subject of power. Less attention has been paid, at least by historians, to another academic development which was especially pertinent to anyone interested in the subject of power.[42] I refer to a particular approach to organizational sociology proposed by Michel Crozier and Erhard Friedberg in their study of the interactions between social actors and the system.[43]

The book deals with the question of the counter-intuitive or perverse effects of collective, that is, organized action. For the authors, to understand this phenomenon it is not enough to study a rational business strategy, we must also consider the logic guiding the behaviour of the employees, the people living and working in that business (or in any other organization). The authors' starting point was to question the dichotomy between the omnipotent organization, supposedly a perfect embodiment of economic rationality, and individuals, whose possibility for action is considered negligible as they are forced either to shape up or ship out. Crozier and Friedberg's approach consisted instead in reintroducing a strategic analysis perspective which looked at the goals of the social actors as well as traditional system analysis which considers problems from the viewpoint of the organization's goals.

Any structure for collective action is created with the aim of mastering the uncertainty of problem solving, as a system of power: that is, the aim to enable individuals to cooperate in collective undertakings requires organization, regulation, adaptation and the creation of power. The latter must be conceptualized differently from the reified form which it is too often given in analysis. In fact, it is generally considered an attribute or a property which sets those who have it against those without it; moreover, it is seen as a property which imposes itself from outside on the social actors, as if they were an impersonal mechanism generally identified with the State with the difference that, on the conservative side, it consists in the exercise of legitimate authority whereas, on the progressive side, it is characterized more as a structure of domination.

As Crozier and Friedberg note, power is neither simply a reflection or product of a structure of authority, be it organizational or social, nor an attribute or property whose means can be appropriated. Power is simply the invariably contingent result of the mobilization of the relevant sources of uncertainty which the actors control in a given game structure, that is, a specific and autonomous mediation of their naturally divergent interests.

In order to examine these interrelations, one needs to move beyond strict discursive logic (or representation, as we would say nowadays) and to focus attention on the actual processes by means of which this discourse embodies itself in reality. This entails carrying out an enquiry which, beginning with the actor, strives to analyse the structuring of his field of action and, at the same time, the mediation which such structuring, in so far as it is a construct with its own dynamics, imposes on the discourse.

Hence, it is necessary to dispense with a negative conception of power which sees power relationships as a product, and a proof, of the plenitude of a power structure and as a means of social dominance; the fact that power sometimes entails coercion does not alter the fact that it may always be analysed as embryonic of collective action which implies bargaining and integration. In fact, relations with others are power relations in so far as an actor continues to be an autonomous subject and not a mere tool.

Saying that social action cannot exist without power is tantamount to saying that an unstructured field with no established rules for collective action does not exist. As every field is structured, there is never one single mode of collective action but multiple, conflicting modes. Hence change cannot be defined as the imposition of an *a priori* model created by a prescient wise person whose rationality must be protected from the irrational acts of resistance by the actors; such resistance may be considered as an expression of obtuse adherence to routine or as subtle conditioning by existing structures of dominance. In fact, change is a process of creating a new way of doing things, in the course of which the members of a given collectivity learn together, that is, they establish or invent new ways of involving themselves in cooperation and in conflict. These new constructs of collective action in turn together create and express a new structuring of the field.

Adopting a strategic viewpoint for analysing individual action does not mean holding the view that actors always have in mind a clear strategy or one that is univocal but only that their behaviours are not random but have a recognizable

sense. At most, one could maintain that behaviour cannot be irrational if it occurs at observable, regular intervals. Strategy is nothing but the *ex post* inferred foundation of empirically observed behavioural regularities.

Power is thus a relationship, not an attribute of actors. It can become manifest and binding for one of the two parties only within a social relationship by means of exchanges and reciprocal adaptations. In other words, power is negotiation, exchange, an instrumental, non-transitive relationship which is reciprocal but not balanced. It is also a relationship of strength in which one obtains more than the other but neither of them is totally unarmed. Economic, social or cultural inequalities between players remain a basic fact but are not sufficient to explain the nature of power relationships. For this to happen, these resources need to be mobilized and to be relevant to the field in question.

Through a power relationship various possibilities of power are exchanged. In fact, power in a strict sense lies in the margin of freedom available to each of the partners, that is, in their ability to refuse what the other is asking. Hence, analysing a power relationship requires above all knowing what trumps and what resources an actor has which enable him to expand his margin of freedom, and then establishing the criteria defining the relevance of these resources and the possibility of mobilizing them. In other words, it is necessary to identify clearly what is at stake in the relationship and the structural bonds constraining it.

Only social organizations, that is, institutions, offer regulation and enable power relationships to develop and so create a foundation for their relative permanence. Control over sources of insecurity assures, within an organization, the position of the individual. This means that various members of an organization will agree to mobilize their resources and confront the risks involved in every power relationship only on condition that they find in the organizations stakes which are in keeping with their own trump cards, that is, goals which are sufficiently remunerative to justify their own mobilization.

5 Power, institutions, identity

Crozier and Friedberg's proposal presents both manifest limits and some indisputable analytical advantages. Especially for historians, it enables them to avoid the risk of overestimating the manipulative possibilities of an ego projected into a kind of vacuum, that is, into an unstructured or poorly regulated field; thus we have a perspective in which the actor is always historically and socially *campé*. This was, in fact, a way of retrieving Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*: the actors' strategy, as delineated by Crozier and Friedberg, would thus constitute a kind of practical sense, the sense of a game;[44] a particular, historically defined social game which was neither unconscious instinct nor purely rational calculation.

On the other hand, by problematizing the question of interests and avoiding the traps of economistic reductionism, it enabled one to take into account the behaviour and orientations of the social actors occupying those structured fields we know as institutions.

In the last two decades of the twentieth century American political science rediscovered the autonomy of institutions by following an approach which was called 'neo-institutionalism'. Within this perspective, as we have seen,[45] institutions were not perceived as free arenas where different social and political forces confront and oppose each other but as structured loci capable to shape roles, values and identities. In the opinion of James March and Johan Olsen, for example, institutions structure individual personalities and guide their behaviours.[46] Accordingly, it is institutions which ultimately control social change and rule public order. Such a viewpoint undoubtedly appeals to historians as it recalls the attraction of institutionalist formalism and its illustrious historiographical tradition. With regard to such analytical approaches, Crozier and Friedberg's standpoint is undeniably important as it recalls the decisive influence of social regulation and negotiation, and shows the constant reuse and modification of normative bonds by the actors.[47]

However, what lacks precision in Crozier and Friedberg's work is the question of the articulation of relations between power and group cohesion or identity, as it is now called.[48] Given the strategic capacity of a group to assert itself within an organization on the basis of its control of uncertainty, the authors' lack of clarity concerns the relationship between this capacity of the group and the struggle for acknowledgement which is manifested in action. In fact, a group acts not only to acquire power but also to exist as a group and to be acknowledged as such and so gain influence over others. This is a symbolic struggle for identity which is inseparable from the strategic competition for power.[49]

For more than a quarter of a century, and not at random, the theme of collective identity, of identity which is chosen, invented, created and recreated, has been, as we have seen, at the centre of social analysis.[50] The rise of identity was paralleled by the crisis of social macro-categories, by the demise of the excessive power given to the interpretative grills imposed *a posteriori* by social scientists and, in the case of historians, by the anachronistic arrogance of 'past prophets'.

In Italy it was essentially thanks to Alessandro Pizzorno that we had the thematization of political activity as inextricably connected with the creation, continuance and modification of collective identities.[51] Arguing against economistic theories which sought to explain political action as the result of rational cost–benefit calculations carried out by individuals imagined as being constantly intent on monitoring their own interests in terms of the expedience of given political options, Pizzorno lists a series of behaviours which, according to these criteria, are completely inexplicable. In fact, individuals perform actions which, when examined strictly from the viewpoint of interests, appear as ends in themselves but which actually generate and regenerate systems of solidarity and affirm and/or reaffirm collective membership. For Pizzorno, this is the specific realm of politics, a realm which should be considered as preliminary to the evaluation of interests. Individuals are only able to perceive their own interests if these are socially acknowledged and form part of a scale of values which is already known and accepted.

Political action operating at this level is more concerned with modifying needs than with satisfying existing needs. Networks of solidarity created by collective

identities solidify the system of interests and provide it with stability over time. Hence political activity shows itself as being able to build collective identities over time and thus able to overcome the uncertainty in which individuals find themselves in deciding what their long-term interests will be. Political activity may thus be said to present two faces, which bear a certain correspondence to the old Maoist distinction between red and expert: on one hand, it is efficient action which produces measures aimed at satisfying given interests and, on the other, it is an identifying process constructed through political discourse, that is, activity directed at affirming and maintaining collective identities by means of symbolic production. That is to say, the production of those symbols which a given social group requires to acquire recognition as a group, to communicate its own solidarity and to agree on collective action.[52]

6 Conclusions: the communicative dimension of power

Crozier and Friedberg's analysis of the interactions between actor and system may be used both to problematize the subject of power as calculating interest and to stress that the identity dimension of power may be useful to check a periodically emerging tendency stressing the autonomous value of ideological power (in Weberian terms, of charismatic power) understood as passion. There is the recurrent temptation to consider the ideological dimension as something distinct, adhering to its own rules; this obviously means to broaden the gap between the prosaic reality of interests directing the normal social dialectic and the sacred fire of ideological passion, which may gain the upper hand at particular periods of ideological tension;[53] such periods, called 'nascent conditions', accompany a revolutionary break.[54]

Replacing the interpretative pair interests/passions (with its clear genesis and specific cultural referents)[55] with the pair power/identity may serve as a useful intermediate step towards reaching a more comprehensive conception which enables enquiry into the structuring of areas of decision-making, the formation of groups and the creation of senses of identity.

An identity perspective admittedly can only partly include the ideological competition which has developed essentially in a linguistic and discursive dimension.[56] This itself is an important aspect of power which is to give names to things and to naturalize a given view of the world, which cannot be assumed to be simply encompassed in the creation and development of social identities. It is to the credit of the so-called *linguistic turn*, which significantly influenced human sciences as a whole, to have stressed the irreducibility of the discursive universe to having a presumed social anchorage.[57]

In the field of historiography as well, the crisis of how power is represented in present-day society has lost much of its former relevance in reconstructing past eras and led to a marked tendency to be wary of the anachronistic elements inherent in many traditional approaches. In fact, as we have seen, a reaction has taken place which tends to consider the political and institutional system as a symbolic system reliant on a fundamentally autonomous and self-referential grammar.[58] From this

derives the frequent tendency to stress the specific organizational logic of traditional societies as a conceptual web to build original and profound kinds of solidarity. From this also comes the temptation to replace the political ordering of the State with a linguistic/symbolic order which structures social language and whose locus of condensation, revealing the density and plenitude of sense of a discursive universe, is its actual vocabulary.[59] Here we have a system which is interpreted as essentially binding and at whose centre there are no longer individuals but linguistic constructs and representations; a system which defines itself ideologically as composed not of persons but of social bodies united by reciprocal obligations.

By way of correcting this perspective, everything so far said about the notion of power allows us to stress that individuals, while immersed in worlds oriented by sense, constantly play with discourses, modify them, and endow words with new meaning through the continuous exchange of communication. There thus emerges, in addition to the strategic system and identity approaches, a third analytical perspective: the communicative perspective.

It is mainly thanks to Hannah Arendt that power was thematized as corresponding to the human ability not merely to act but to act together. For Arendt, power was never the property of an individual but of a group, and existed so long as the group held firm. When we say that someone is in power we refer to the fact – she writes – that this person is given power by a group in whose name the person acts. Hence, power is not using the will of others as a tool but the creation of a common will by linguistic communication aimed at reaching agreement. In other words, power serves to protect a given way of proceeding, and it is from this very way of proceeding that power originates. Power solidifies and is incorporated into institutions, and is manifested in rules defending freedom, in resisting tyranny and in revolutionary acts of liberation. In Arendt, there is the ethically satisfying view that any political order which hinders or prevents the public exchange of opinions degenerates into a tyranny based on violence; and it is violence which destroys the communicative structures from which power actually originates, and through which it manifests itself.[60]

This concept of power as communication reveals clear limits which were indicated by Jürgen Habermas in his perceptive essay on Arendt.[61] For instance, it is clear that Arendt's ideal of the Athenian model of democracy is not particularly useful in explaining some of the major contradictions of our time. However, Arendt's point of view is fruitful in asserting that there is a component of communication which is fundamental both to the strategic dimension and to the identity dimension of power. This component might be defined as hegemonic. The effect of the power of communication identified by Arendt, that is, a stable *modus convivendi*, is, in fact, a result of the victory of communication: that is, the establishment of a *doxa* which is presumed to be the best synthesis, and the most suitable response to the problems of a community, an institution, business or a society.[62]

Clearly, if one maintains that there is a communicative dimension to strategic and identity structures, then from the point of view of a communicative perspective there are also strategic/utilitarian and identity aspects which need to be taken

into account. This may be clearly seen when one uses the admittedly controversial concept of the public sphere, which does have the merit of showing that it is in a structured field that the linguistic and ideological dispute takes place. First, because access to the public sphere is on hierarchical lines and is linked to specific affiliations. Second, because confrontation within the public sphere occurs on the basis of a given number of resources being activated: these are primarily economic but are also cultural (technical, operational, intellectual) and symbolic. Finally, it is precisely by means of the public sphere that we have the circulation of the cultural models which give shape to the constructs of action which give rise to identification and to our construction of ourselves. In the public sphere, historical discourse in particular performs an extremely important function in debating our view of the world, and historiography (which is given the social function, so to speak, of monitoring the correctness of that discourse) also takes its part in considering the sense and orientation of collective existence.[63]

Our circumnavigation has so brought us back to the point of departure. The concept of power, which originates in the public sphere, invades 'our' language, that is, the artificial language of social scientists and historians. There is now far greater awareness than in the past that not only social (or historical) actors find themselves in a regulated field but so do their interpreters, who also find themselves in institutions which define a social profession indicated by distinctive marks and by professional jargons (or even, banally, ways of citing and of not citing sources), all features which indicate both being different and belonging. Moreover, nowadays one is conscious that this professional field is awash with the same complex power dynamics with which these pages have tried to come to terms: that it is hierarchically structured, that it is criss-crossed by coteries, cliques and factions, that it is characterized by an unequal distribution of resources, and so on. Power, in short, is simultaneously something we study and an integral part of us as social beings. Here perhaps lies a not insignificant reason for our difficulties in thematizing power and in neatly distinguishing between scientific discourse, and political and civil discourse.

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7

GENERATIONS

A successful German film of 2003, *Good bye, Lenin!*, tells the story of how a young man demonstrates his loving concern for his mother who, in the momentous year 1989, entered a coma from which she would emerge eight months later. So as to avoid causing her a major trauma, day after day he recreates for her a world which had vanished virtually overnight while she was in a coma: he keeps and retrieves objects, rites and even GDR television news dating from the recent period, now gone for ever.[1] The massive upheaval brought about by the fall of the Berlin Wall, and by the sudden and total change to the world that people knew, imparts an aura of nostalgia to this well-meaning charade, and what is a grotesque situation is treated with feeling.

The film's theme of people living through a period of rapid change attracted from the start – inevitably attracted, one might say – the attention of historians. In an article a few years before the collapse of the Soviet Union, the German medievalist Arnold Esch recalled Washington Irving's story *Rip Van Winkle* (1819), in which the eponymous character, who had grown up in the middle of the eighteenth century on the banks of the Hudson as a faithful subject of His Britannic Majesty, awakes, after a sleep of 20 years, ill-prepared to answer the inevitable question of where his loyalty lies: is he a Federalist, a Republican or a Democrat?[2] These are baffling questions for a person from before the War of Independence. Tracing a literary theme dating from Ulysses to Baron Attinghausen in Friedrich Schiller's *William Tell* ('My time is also buried. Happy those who no longer need to live in the new time!'), Esch stressed the significance of people finding themselves in a time warp, of returning and no longer finding the world they knew. On the basis of these temporal leaps, involving enigmatic characters such as the Frenchman Martin Guerre and the Italian case of Bruneri-Canella, the 'Collegno Amnesiac', both studied by historians,[3] Esch counterposed the artificial division of

time into periods (the periodization of historians) and the intensely personal, lived experience of a given period.

The appeal of such a theme for historians lies both *inside* and *outside* their professional sphere of interest. This ambivalence may be exemplified by the Italian modern historian Furio Diaz, who, despite acknowledging that the concept of generation is 'tenuous and somewhat spurious', writes that the concept 'even if marked by a degree of schematism and even of rather strained sociology' still proves 'useful in characterizing the mentality, the general trends, the historical motivations, the lifestyle and the thought patterns of some intellectual and civil groups in given periods'.[4] Diaz was particularly referring to the experience of his own generation of those born between the end of the First World War and the 1920s who came to public life after the Second World War proudly conscious of the force of their own seriousness as studious and well-educated young people. Another Italian historian, Claudio Donati, striving to be as analytical as possible, asked himself in one of his last essays if it was possible to identify an 'Enlightenment generation' by isolating intellectuals born between the symbolic dates 1713 (the year of Diderot's birth) and 1727 (the year of Turgot's birth).[5] What resulted was a cohort of famous intellectuals, which caused him to exclaim:

> in reading through the list, is it possible not to note a family resemblance, a kind of complicity linking the various people, regardless of their genealogy, their family background, their place of birth, their education, their profession, the positions they occupied, their preferences, their idiosyncrasies and, obviously, their chosen fields of endeavour?

However, such intuitive certainty also encounters a series of difficulties, not least of which is the glaring omission of Voltaire himself, born in 1694. These examples seem to exemplify the wavering opinions with which the concept of generation has been received, and is still received, among historians. On one hand, the concept seems particularly resistant to any coherent definition, it is inevitably arbitrary when applied to this or that actual case, and it is perilously inclined to take on general, and frequently impossible, applications; on the other, it is seductive in its appeal to a widespread and broadly shared opinion, it is attractive for its capacity to serve as a conduit leading to new ways of articulating the nexus between past and present, and moreover it carries an emotional freight in that it recalls a period of life, between adolescence and post-adolescence, which is so significant that, in retrospect, it becomes the matter of myth: *the way we were*.[6]

The same ambivalence was well described by the first modern historian to study the concept of generation, François Mentré:

> Brilliant minds were convinced that, with this concept, they had found the key to unlocking history. However, the key was tested and was found to work badly. It was put aside and the mind was freed from the idea. But it keeps coming back and, when it seems to be dead, it returns to life. Despite numerous bouts of scepticism, I have still not managed to cure myself.[7]

Perhaps it is worthwhile to attempt to delve more deeply into the reasons for this subtle appeal, which may be called the generational lure. It should be noted that this involves not only the enormous circulation which the notion of a coherent, generational context enjoys in the public sphere, dominated as it is by mass media which are irresistibly attracted by the nexus between the mutability of fashion and changing lifestyles; and which perhaps see this as a possible means of providing a ready delineation of a period or of scanning a particular moment in time, both of which are probably far more complex. The question also involves the credibility, albeit intermittent, which the idea has enjoyed in a vast range of disciplines, including psychology, psychoanalysis, art history, the history of literature, sociology and history. We are here dealing not with an expression of natural language but with a widespread concept which at times receives 'academic' recognition, which is invariably controversial and, under some aspects, *sui generis*.

In recent times, the crisis of the notion of social macro-categories, and the impressive rise of identity distinctions as the sole heuristic tool pertinent to recognizing groups in a social universe which appears (and perhaps is) rather fragmented, seem to be an inducement to using the concept of generation which, theoretically at least, presents itself as manageable, flexible and less rigid than the grand categories of nation and class which had become naturalized in the past.

Perhaps, rather than going in search of concrete evidence for the consistency and cogency of at least one generation – an undertaking which recalls some scholastic syllogisms proving the existence of God – and inevitably finding oneself grappling with the tired but irrefutable counter indications for the actual use of the notion, it is worth asking the question how and why the idea of a generation, or rather of generations, enjoyed the influence it did among historians and social scientists: such influence, while not being huge, was certainly far from negligible. Our hope, in itself not fanciful, is that such an approach may provide both the reasons for this interest and the specific conditions which would enable the concept to be partially deployed, provided it satisfies some stringent constraints.

1 Wave on wave

The history of the modern concept of generation dates back to revolutionary France. It originated in the importance given by the patriots of 1789 to the idea of *re*generation, that is, to the stress on the radical distinction between the previous regime of subjects and the 'new world' of citizens; the patriots set themselves the task of creating not only the institutions of a renewed society but also a renewed human race.[8] The idea of a generation as forming part of a society's unbroken continuation over time, with its roots in the Bible and classical literature, is counterposed by the idea of a generation as marking a caesura, as an autonomous, independent moment in the making of the world. As has been observed: 'It is the shared conviction of being part of a totally new generation which enables the creation of a generation as a historical subject.'[9]

One might say that restoring sovereignty to the generation as well as to the individual was then held to be a duty. This is shown by the much quoted Article 20 of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen which formed the

preamble to the 1793 Constitution: the article laid down that one generation was not to impose its own laws on future generations. In other words, as Saint-Just observed, one generation cannot fetter another but should leave it the right to choose, in Thomas Paine's words, the government which best represents it.[10]

The feeling of being part of a new world, and hence being a new generation, was also noted by opponents of the Revolution, such as Restif de la Bretonne, who launched his invective against the generation which had grown up under the Revolution, branding it as a 'teasing, stubborn, insolent, impudent, headstrong generation, which speaks loudly, shuts the mouth of the elderly, and with equal audacity demonstrates now its innate folly, reinforced by education, now its immature wisdom'.[11]

However, there is another reason, dependent on the first, which served to propose the theme of generation as one possible way of interpreting French history. This was the alternation of regimes which marked, after the Revolution, much of the nineteenth century and characterized its political history: Napoleonic Empire, Bourbon Restoration, July Monarchy, Second Empire and creation of the Third Republic. At relatively brief intervals, a series of political upheavals led to a radical renewal of political personnel: these changes were such as to give the impression of the ascension to power of different generations which succeeded one another in a succession of events invariably punctuated by the reappearance of barricades in the streets of Paris.[12]

One of the authors whom Mentré mentions in reconstructing his history of the theme was Justin Dromel, a lawyer from Marseille who wrote some articles published in the *Courier de Paris* in December 1857 and collected as a book in 1862 with the title of *La loi des révolutions*.[13] For Dromel, every political generation (to his mind, those aged between 25 and 60) dialectically bases the distinctive features of its superior political ideal on the acts carried out by the preceding generation. He observed that in 1815 the political generation was made up of people who had lived through both proscription in the Republic and conscription in the Empire, and who therefore aimed for a moderate return to the *ancien régime*. However, in 1830 their new and definitive experience of the *ancien régime*, and of the Bourbon dynasty, had again revealed itself to be irreconcilable with the new principles and had been swept away. Again, in 1848, a new generation wanted a solution which would be unlike both 1815 and 1830. Dromel saw in this wave-like movement of generations, one succeeding another, one opposed to the other, as a story of constant progress. One generation holds power for a period of about 16 years while a new, younger generation undergoes its political apprenticeship, draws examples from what lies before its eyes, and so gains its own experience, unlike that of the generation preceding it and holding power.[14]

Dromel's interest in the notion of generation was clearly an attempt to make sense of the course of French history. The same applies, rather less directly, to Antoine-Augustine Cournot. The celebrated mathematician and philosopher, and forerunner of French Positivism, published in 1872, at the age of 71, his *Considérations sur la marche des idées et des événements dans les temps modernes*. His book,

written in the aftermath of the Commune and at the time of the difficult birth of the Third Republic, takes as its starting point the observation that nothing accentuates age differences so much as the convulsions of a society that is falling apart. In peaceful times, generations succeed each other with a slow, regular rhythm, but when deeply unsettling events are concentrated in a short lapse of time, the balance of forces making up a generation collapses more quickly and generations become shorter. Generational space, which is occupied by conflicts between the old, that is, by the people still actively holding power, and the young, breaks down to make way for a new state of equilibrium.[15]

Mentré's own interest in the subject of generations was mediated both by Cournot's intellectual legacy and by discussion in France in 1911–14 about the *jeunes gens*: the debate bore the mark of the nationalistic fervour preceding the outbreak of war and of the disquiet pervading the public sphere in France. The point at issue, which engaged public opinion as a whole, was the question of the physical and moral qualities of the young who would be the soldiers of the future. The highpoints of the public debate were in 1912, with the publication of a pamphlet by Agathon (pseudonym of Henri Massis and Alfred de Tarde),[16] and in the immediate aftermath of the war when the subject, now detached from the explosive political energy which had marked its period of fervour, was taken up again in the field of literary and stylistic analysis: this was an approach based on literary generations which Victor Giraud had inaugurated in 1911,[17] and which became firmly established by Albert Thibaudet's *Histoire de la littérature française de 1789 à nos jours* (published posthumously in 1936),[18] and by later works by Henri Peyre.[19]

In this way the generational theme, despite being marginalized in the inter-war period, found some resonance in France and even enabled Yves Renouard to attempt to relaunch it in the *Revue Historique* of 1953.[20] Renouard noted that Peyre attempted to avoid Thibaudet's rigid outlook, based on the generational model of 30 years which Auguste Conte himself had proposed: that is, identifying a 1789 Revolutionary generation; an 1820 Restoration generation; an 1850 generation, that is, the 1848 generation; an 1885 generation, which confronted the crisis unleashed by the Dreyfus affair; and, finally, a 1914 generation, which was the war generation.

As Renouard observed, Peyre's attempt to offer a *souple* definition of generations was made possible by his drawing on the thinking of the Spanish philosopher Ortega y Gasset, especially his notion of generation as the meeting point between individual and collectivity. For Ortega, when people enter the world, they are shaped by a system of interpretations and hence they share with those of their own generation a life trajectory marked by a specific sensitivity. It is well to remember that, for Ortega as well as for Macías Picavea, Ángel Ganivet and Miguel de Unamuno, this sensitivity was marked by the so-called *desastre* of 1898, Spain's loss of empire, and by its decline to being the *triste país* which Pio Baroja bewailed. The notion of the famous 'Generation of 1898', as it was denominated by Azorin in 1913,[21] the group of outstanding intellectuals, imbued with the ideas of the *Idearium español* and

intent on investigating the reasons for the decline of Spain, was in fact immediately challenged ('none of us was reading Ganivet and we were pursuing other directions both in literature and politics' Baroja was to write).[22] Nonetheless, it may be said of this generation that it formed the basis for understanding the concept in Spain (and hence for understanding Spanish history) just as much as the 1820 generation did in France: both were similarly composed of outstanding thinkers and writers. Moreover, Ortega's ideas were very clear: for him, a generation was made up of a minority able to bring about renewal, and a silent majority. It was the active, vital, loquacious minority which represented the entire generation.[23]

2 Grounding the concept of generation

An interest in generations was not confined to historians. In fact, it was the sociologist Karl Mannheim who, in 1927, put forward an approach which was the most serious attempt to provide a scholarly basis for the study of generations. Mannheim was well aware of the interest of both historians and the general public in the subject.[24] He stated that the notion of a generation may be considered as naturally stemming from a historicist viewpoint with its insistence on the fundamental role, in studying cultural processes, of dating them and placing them in a historical period; this alone would enable their comprehension. Working from these premises, Mannheim noted, we may reach the conclusion that it is possible to distinguish the ideas of a new generation from those of an older generation.

For Mannheim, this interest in generations was linked to two opposing cultural trends, from both of which he distanced himself: the Positivist quantitative and biologizing trend, and the Romantic metaphysical, qualitative and historicizing one. Especially for the Positivist, the attraction of the concept sprang from the desire to find regularity:

> The Positivist is attracted by the problem of generations because it gives him the feeling that here he has achieved contact with some of the ultimate factors of human existence as such. There is life and death; a definite, measurable span of life; generation follows generation at regular intervals. Here, thinks the Positivist, is the framework of human destiny in comprehensible, even measurable form.[25]

In describing the beginning and successive stages of this period of Positivism, Mannheim had principally in mind the already mentioned work by François Mentré, *Les générations sociales*, which appeared in 1920. A pupil of Éspinas and an expert on Cournot, Mentré had in fact asked the founder of French sociology himself, Émile Durkheim, to read his book in manuscript and had availed himself of his critical comments and suggestions. In tracing the genealogy of the concept of culture proposed by Mentré, Mannheim placed its essential nature and unifying element in an approach typifying classic French rationalism. From Dromel to Comte, Cournot and Mentré himself 'it shows the French mind at work in its

own domain';[26] this mind was intent on discovering a general law which would express the rhythm of historical progress by basing it on a biological fact, that is, an individual's lifetime. Moreover, this general law would unite biology and culture (*noologie*, to use the term then current), and would enable the changing intellectual and social currents to be conceived in biological terms. Presented in this form, the history of ideas seems like a chronological table, and the core of the problem lies in establishing the average time needed for one generation to supersede the previous one.

The way in which Mannheim proposed to articulate afresh the concept of generation distanced itself from any such approach. In delineating his own perspective, he rhetorically counterposed it to the Positivist tradition which he correctly stressed was open to use by both progressive and moderate political forces, that is, by the Romantic, metaphysical German tradition, which was politically conservative. The latter was centred on the concept of generations as actual *entelechies* (a philosophical term deriving from Aristotle and Leibniz which indicates entities endowed with their own real, autonomous vital force). These can be intuitively grasped by means of a qualitative approach, but are not amenable to rational analysis and, even less so, to formalization based on mathematical and/or quantitative models. Whereas in a Liberal perspective the succession of generations articulates a view of history with at its centre the notion of unilinear progress, the Romantic historical school instates the concept of generation with the specific purpose of putting in check the concept of progress by introducing an experiential dynamic (*Erlebnis*) which is not analysable or measurable from outside because its rhythms derive from an inner time of its own which differs from linear time. Such an inner and historical experience of time was described as emanating from within, *von innen*. Mannheim maintained that there was only a short step from this to Heidegger's view of destiny as the sum of individual destinies and as being together in the same world.[27]

For Mannheim it was a 'complete misconception' to connect the subject, as Positivist scholars did, to demonstrating a rhythm of generations recurring at unchanging intervals,[28] and, at the same time, the concept of entelechy seemed to him to close the door to scholarly analysis. Hence, for Mannheim, the challenge for sociology was to establish the objective conditions determining the existence of a generation, that is, the conditions which can be analysed from outside, regardless of how they are perceived by the actors themselves. To do so, he introduced the concept of location (*Lagerung*) which indicates given features which create a bond among some individuals not by their choice but by the sole fact of having been born in a given place and at a given time. In striving to give a scholarly basis to the concept of generation, Mannheim relied on a category, class, which was then considered the most tried and tested. Those belonging to a given group present similarities, Mannheim stated, simply because their first, crucial experiences brought them into contact with the same thing. Hence, there is, in Mannheim's opinion, a sort of point-blank effect which has the result that youthful experiences are different from the same experiences later in life.[29]

Hence, just as with class, a generation is neither a community (*Gemeinschaftsgebilde*) based on close and actual personal knowledge of one another, nor an association (*Gesellschaftsgebilde*), which one enters and may leave. Being part of a generation is similar to being linked to a class: such a position excludes many possible lifestyles and various kinds of experiences, which instead are restricted and directed towards given ways of behaving, of thinking and of feeling. A generation thus represents a kind of location, a sense of belonging embracing age-groups which are connected and embedded in a given historical and social process. Such belonging, Mannheim noted, is not based simply on being contemporaries but on shared, stratified experience (*Erlebnisschichtung*).

Just as belonging to a class does not automatically entail class consciousness, so being part of a generation does not entail awareness of the fact. For us to be able to speak concretely of a generation, there must be a bond created among some of its members by their common exposure to the intellectual and social symptoms of a dynamic process of destabilization, which thus effectively plays the same role for a generation as alienation, in Marx's thinking, does for class. From this experiential bond various generational subdivisions may arise, which may themselves acquire self-awareness and become mutually antagonistic.

It is interesting that Mannheim, constrained by the forced analogy with class, tended to see the problem of the representativeness of an educated minority with a public voice vis-à-vis a generation as a whole as the Procrustean bed of the classic Marxist motif of the relationship between the masses and the vanguard. This throws light on some of his comments on the possibility that a generational faction may be led by older members. As in the case of class, even if the creator of a class ideology belongs to a different class, as may happen, the real set of the class ideology still remains the class itself, so, in the case of generation location, the generation remains the real set of new impulses.[30]

Mannheim was clearly aware that intellectuals are a particular social group, the only group which may be considered to be relatively unfettered, that is, socially unattached. From this derives, he observed, their ability to oscillate between trends and between opposite poles. However, as he also noted, if we look only to intellectuals, we gain a distorted view because it is not they who generate innovative impulses but the tight-knit, counter posed social groups underlying the élites which are polarized into antagonistic trends.

This is not the place to take up again the subject of historiographical discussions on the concept of class, but one thing is perfectly clear: Mannheim's treatment of the concept of generation eventually exposes it to the same devastating criticism to which the notion of class was subjected. To continue with this parallel between generation and class, one might point out that, in the case of class, the historiographical outcome, itself the starting point for further intense debate, was E. P. Thompson's critique of the structuralist viewpoint and his famous proposition of a class struggle without class,[31] then one might also speak of generational conflicts without generations. This is a point which deserves later consideration.

Alan B. Spitzer, in his survey of generational studies, which had gained a new lease of life in the USA in the years after 1968, observed: 'The attempt to grasp the essence of the historical process through the analysis of age-specific relationship analogous to the Marxian analysis of class relationship has raised more problems than it can hope to solve.'[32] It was Spitzer himself who would subsequently undertake one of the most ambitious attempts at generational analysis in his study of the French generation of 1820.

3 Historians and the notion of generation

The lack of continuity in applying the concept of generation to twentieth-century history was due to a scathing article. Marc Bloch, in his *Apologie pour l'Histoire*, had left a window open to a possible use of the concept of generation;[33] Lucien Febvre, conversely, firmly closed the door. In 1928, in a debate organized by the *Revue de synthèse*,[34] he defined the notion of generation as 'parasitic, muddled and ill defined', and bluntly concluded that it was better simply to shed it.

However, the explanation given by Febvre for the reasons which induced historians to make use of a concept about whose value, in his opinion, there could be no possible illusions, was itself unconvincing. For Febvre, the idea of a generation sprang from widespread dissatisfaction with a chronological framework made up of periods of a merely formal nature, which was perceived as puerile and fit only for schools, and from the desire to replace an event-based periodization with a division based on historical actors. However, opposing this proposed substitution, where generations would take the place of periods, there were a number of counter indications, perhaps the strongest being that, whereas agreement about division into periods could often be found at an international level, division by generations was invariably found to vary from nation to nation. Febvre's argument is essentially methodological, scholarly, and with no specific historical content.[35] However, as we have seen, attention was paid to the concept of generation because of a given historical context and it regularly re-emerges when prompted by contemporary events.

As for the continued existence of an explanatory model based on the recurrence and succession of generations, there is an entire tradition of sociological and demographic studies relying on so-called age-groups[36] and cohorts, that is, on kinship groups, which attempted to formulate hypotheses valid at a general level.[37]

In the USA generations have been studied in an attempt to create profiles, that is, groups of consumers with similar tendencies, on the assumption that 'since each generation has a distinct character, the issues, products, services, advertising and media that resonate with people in their early thirties today might not work for the age group a decade from now'.[38] This led in the 1990s to offering the general public 90 popular summaries, based on a view of American history as divisible into generations, five of them still alive, which aimed at forecasting future trends.[39]

However, in the field of history, the concept has been redeployed only sporadically and intermittently. Not by chance it was again a French scholar, Philippe

Ariès, who conceived generations as one way of telling the history of France.[40] In the opinion of this author, who was conscious of the arbitrariness of choosing periods in which to locate a generation, generations should be defined on the basis of their ability to interpret social change, and thus should follow a social and cultural periodization different and distinct from political periodization. The fact remains that the generations which he proposed were the generation born between 1830 and 1850 in a virtually unchanging rural France; the generation born between 1870 and 1890, which was his own parents' generation, which was one of transition, vital, tireless and with a bold mixture of archaism and modernity; these two generations were succeeded by the generation of those born between 1910 and 1920, Ariès' own generation as he was born in 1914, described as a generation which guided the extraordinary success of the post Second World War period, which broke from a past whose values it was unwilling to pass on, and which was exceptional for its organizational ability but not for its inventive skills. However, it is strange that this all culminates with the generation of the children of progress, those who turned 20 between 1960 and 1970, whose upbringing owed more to television than to their parents and who had doubts about procreation, progress and, perhaps, the future. Being a political event, 1968 was, consistently, not mentioned.

Hence, it comes as no surprise that the most substantial historical work centred on the use of the concept of generation, Alan B. Spitzer's book, concerns French history. It is a study, published in 1987, of the 1820 cultural generation. If it is true that each generation produces its own history of generations, his book is actually a curious example of a 'middle way' as it strives to combine an objective demonstration that age-differences matter, with the compelling story of how a generational myth is created.[41] The two approaches coexist, not without some difficulties, despite the fact that the author tries to accommodate both with the blanket assertion that proof for a generation's existence should be sought in forms of collective behaviour, in networks of personal relationships, in shared assumptions underlying an ideology and attitudes which constitute a mentality: in a word, in whatever evokes a common response to circumstances at the time and distinguishes that cohort from contemporary individuals. Spitzer's proposal was that the chronological limit for admission into the 1820 generation is to have been born between 1792 and 1803: he thus marked his disagreement with Thibaudet, who in this generation had included Lamartine, born in 1790, and Théophile Gautier, born in 1811. Although Spitzer was well aware that these chronological limits were not 'self-evident benchmarks' but 'arbitrary boundaries', it is clear enough that 1792 was chosen to bring into the 1820 generation Victor Cousin, who in some ways was their respected master, while 1803 is pushed back so as not to exclude Victor Hugo, born in 1802. Spitzer's list includes 183 members of the Parisian intelligentsia, chosen on the assumption that they were sufficiently prominent to be representative of their peers; Spitzer thus shares Ortega's view that a generation is characterized by a small minority, an élite. From Mannheim he derives the notion of historical location in order to define a generation which experienced the trauma of the end of the Empire, which had its revolutionary and conspiratorial initiation between June and

August 1820, underwent the repressive consequences, and then sought refuge from direct political involvement in cultural and intellectual endeavours.

On one hand, his book carefully describes the channels of socialization, the academic, political and personal networks, intellectual influences, publishing activities and university or professional careers. As the ideology of progress and truth embodied in history is not sufficient to explain the anti-establishment character of this youthful generation, recourse is had to a classic mode of explanation: frustrated mobility. For Spitzer, neither the sporadic silencing, or manipulation, of the press nor the purges of university staff are sufficient to explain hostility against the Restoration regime and so other theories are advanced: overcrowding of occupations and lack of available jobs given the demand and expectations. This is a way of appealing to the idea of the revolution of the *déclassés*, of doctors without patients, of architects without commissions, of journalists without newspapers and of lawyers without clients; the picture is of guests invited to a banquet who, finding no room, overturn the table. In this context the term gerontocracy, which was perhaps coined by Jean-Jacob 'James' Fazy in 1828, was widespread.[42]

However, Spitzer's book also recounts the extraordinary process of inventing a generation. It was extraordinary in the first place because the protagonists were exceptional people and included, among others, Augustin Thierry, Adolphe Thiers, François Mignet, Auguste Comte, Antoine Cournot, Victor Hugo, Eugène Delacroix, Honoré de Balzac and Alfred de Vigny. It was also extraordinary for the early flowering of their talents, which established a particularly strong bond between youth and cultural renewal. Finally, it was extraordinary for the enormous impression which they produced on their contemporaries who saw them as a special group, separate from their predecessors and successors by virtue of their talent and their convictions, and representative of a *soufflé de rénovation*, and of everything which at the time was most promising, fresh and youthful. Benjamin Constant, addressing the Chamber of Deputies in 1822, described them as 'less frivolous than that of the Old Regime, less passionate than that of Revolution, *la jeunesse actuelle* is distinguished by its thirst for knowledge, its love of scholarship, and its devotion to truth'.[43]

This generation's literary and cultural turning point came after the repression of the June 1820 uprising when its mettle was tested after the fall of the Decazes ministry, and in the protests against the property-based franchise. In a kind of collective rite of self-identification, the generation attended *en masse* the funeral of Nicolas Lallemand, a law student killed by the police. What is striking, Spitzer notes, was the sense of a generational mission, the transition from Jules Michelet's expressed desire to take up a rifle to a serious demeanour, to a lofty moral tone, to a sense of personal and collective superiority, and to a need to read the past so as to shape the future, qualities which remained etched in the perception of contemporaries and in the collective memory.

This strong generational identity found expression in the creation of a newspaper, the *Globe*, the editorial staff of which had an average age of 27 and which would become the voice of what Charles Augustin de Sainte-Beuve would call 'a persecuted, youthful elite'. It was not by chance that it was in this newspaper that

Théodore Jouffroy, a *carbonaro* who had been purged from his teaching position at the *École normale*, published in 1825 a famous article, written in 1823, which would be considered the manifesto of that generation[44] – later called by De Musset *les enfants du siècle* – which was a model for other generations which succeeded it and drew inspiration from it.

4 Generational memory and constructing an event

As the example of the French generation of 1820 shows, a concept of generation which is viable for writing history is basically limited to establishing the self-representation of groups with a public voice who feel themselves legitimized to speak for their silent contemporaries (the 'generational silent majorities'). In France such self-representation developed according to the canons of political rhetoric and was already operative from the time of the 1820 generation, and perhaps even earlier, from the time of the Thermidor *jeunesse dorée*. After 1968 and the Vietnam war, the theme of generation progressively spread, along with the proliferation of generational narratives, to other parts of Europe and the world. It is now evident that, at the heart of a generation, lies its own story and hence the concept of generation cannot be separated from generational memory, that is, the tradition of an identity constructed around the account of a shared experience.

As Pierre Nora noted, if we want to avoid the triviality and haziness of the concept of generation, we need to acknowledge that a generation's self-affirmation and the construction of its memory are two aspects of the same phenomenon.[45] In the representation of a generation there is a symbolic content laden with an account of lived experiences and an interpretation of the events which marked this account.[46] It is this content which gives authority to, and enables, the dynamics of mutual recognition and belonging. For this reason a generation should also be considered as a site of memory which is created not only by memorial germination dating back to the time of the events themselves but also by retrospective reconstruction. The result is this: 'Clearly memory is today the lynchpin of definitions of generation, and consequently a generation is now a purely symbolic unit of time, a favorite device for representing change whose acceptance reflects and consecrates the advent of the social actor.'[47]

Such self-proclamation of a generational consciousness naturally provokes conflict, that is, a polarized field where the symbolic construction of 'us' as opposed to 'them' is created. In this symbolic construction politics is blended with literature, artistic expression and music. It is this hegemonic blend which enables the generational discourse to be interiorized by the nation as a whole. For Nora, French society ascribes to the young a mission to achieve, in which it is happy to recognize itself. This is a lasting legacy of the Revolution which endowed the young with a sense of a supreme mission which could reach the point of violent self-sacrifice and which also tacitly authorized rebellion: as Sartre wrote, *on à toujours raison de se révolter*.[48]

However, there is a further hereditary trait which characterizes French society in defining a generation, which is the use of history in the processes of constructing

an identity. Memorialization draws on historical parallels, on the play of identities and resemblances, of recurring cycles, and on commemorations. The past does not pass and the historical actors do not die but remain present to accompany the representation, thus themselves becoming witnesses while other witnesses turn into actors.[49]

A significant example of this is the memory of 1968, whose commemorative representativeness is assumed by groups of those once involved in the movement who, as Nora observed, gave it a hypertrophied generational aspect which had been minimized by 1789. In fact, in Nora's view, in the case of 1968, the generational symbolism became the event itself. This was made possible by the degree of autonomy achieved by the world of the young which was partially separated by its clothes, its yardsticks and its idols, and which manifested itself *en masse* in the early 1960s, perhaps for the first time in Place de la Nation in Paris on 21 June 1963 when 150,000 young people celebrated the famous *Nuit des copains*.[50]

It is not events in themselves which unite a generation but how these events are interpreted, which often occurs some time later. This can be shown by consulting the considerable literature now existing about lost generations such as the *générations du feu*, the war generations: 'We were aged twenty/We left behind family and friends/We landed in Algeria/and we became soldiers'.[51] In war one lives together the experience of the variation of time which alternates moments of risk and tragedy which flash by at breakneck speed with days when, as a soldier wrote in August 1958, we do nothing and don't even bother to speak to one another, such is the level of boredom.[52] On returning home, these men are aware of having shared a unique experience with their fellow soldiers, but they are still not aware of having been part of a generation. It was the period after the war, with its debates, its controversies and its occasional recriminations, which forged the sense of being a generation.[53] This was often bolstered by the myth of young men who had been sacrificed. Paul Fussell has written, war necessarily relies on the young because of their vigour but, above all, because they are not aware of their own mortality.[54]

In his later works Koselleck also stressed the existence of a space in generational experience which is a second temporal level in addition to the level of political activity and which grounds historical experience.[55] For him, a generation is situated at a level between the level of events and that of periods as it is a structure constitutive of modern historical temporality. Thus we have the multi-stratification of meanings, the 'contemporaneity of the non-contemporaneous' which was the basis of Koselleck's *Begriffsgeschichte*.

However, there is one aspect of the discourse which receives little attention from either Koselleck or Nora, and that is the dynamics of discourses dealing with the matter of conflict. A generational discourse is invariably also a historical explanation, an account of one's own position in the world, of one's own *location* vis-à-vis the things which were done which are explained and so become events. Such explanation is by no means univocal but is a terrain where there is competition about both generational representativeness and the interpretation of the world: events, that is, the things which took place tend, once they are explained, to divide

rather than unite those adhering to one or other explanation. The more these events are traumatic and linked to terrible stories of death, war, exclusion and violence, the more they take on a symbolic dimension which tends to mark a generation.[56] As has rightly been pointed out:

> It should be obvious, however, that all formulations of the nature 'of the age' and 'of the generation' are essentially mythic in character; no age is entirely romantic, classic, anxious or conformist and no 'generation' is wholly lost, found, beat – and certainly not silent. Nevertheless cultural struggles go on *as if* possession of the myth of the age were at stake, and in a sense it is, for those who win the struggle to be considered 'representative' of their age.[57]

5 Conclusions: the generation call

As we have seen, the category 'generation' became significant 'only because the importance of the traditional criteria of social classification diminished and traditional social identities proved inadequate'.[58] As in other fields of historical research, the close attention given to the subject of generations underwent its own 'hermeneutic turn' and generations also came to be as imagined communities resulting from inventions of tradition. Attention was thus given to how generations were denominated, how they were 'constructed' through the filter of media, and to the decisive importance, in the processes of generational identification, of the choice of a name both representing and interpreting these generations: the baby-boomers generation,[59] the hip-hop generation[60] and the like. It was not by chance that these names were often created by leading intellectuals, such as Ernest Hemingway (or Gertrude Stein) for the *Lost Generation*,[61] or by Jack Kerouac for the *Beat Generation*.[62]

Moreover, more recently, the rise of *memorial history* has provided the category of generation with a new field in which to operate. It may be that this is why, in the present historical panorama, studies deploying the concept of a generation have enjoyed a return to favour. However, the generations to which they refer are not generations in Mannheim's sense, which was an attempt to find an 'objective' definition of belonging to a group, but generations understood as communities of experience intent on memorializing their common past.[63] Owing to the success of oral history and to the powerful influence of psychology and psychoanalysis, research now focuses on the nature of the trauma which defines a generation, be it war,[64] or racial, religious, national or gender violence. It also focuses on how the successive generation, consisting of the victims' offspring, reconsiders the trauma and represents it in new accounts, which are products of rationalization and also of mythic elaboration which have been denominated *postmemory*.[65] The approach used in generational studies of immigrant communities in the USA[66] has also been applied to studying the generation of Holocaust survivors.[67] The result has been that the concept of generation, which originally aimed to locate an individual within a homogeneous cohort or a culturally cohesive group, is now adopted as a

point of reference which is sufficiently flexible to write history open to conflicting interpretations and to contrasting standpoints. In a word, we have a concept of generation which is sufficiently weak and elusive to be the point of confluence of oral history,[68] of experiential history and of psycho-history.[69] One may venture to say that, since the concept of generation entered the paradigm of memorial history, the concept itself has ceased to be what it once was.

Notes

1 German film of 2003 directed by Wolfgang Becker, screenplay by Becker and Bernd Lichtenberg.
2 A. Esch, 'Le prospettive della periodizzazione storica: epoca e generazione', *Comunità*, XXXIX/187 (November 1985), pp. 1–38.
3 N. Zemon Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre*, Cambridge MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1983 (1st edn Paris 1982); L. Roscioni, *Lo smemorato di Collegno. Storia italiana di un'identità contesa*, Turin: Einaudi, 2008.
4 F. Diaz, 'Introduzione', in R. Pasta (ed.), *Cultura, intellettuali e circolazione delle idee nel '700*, Milan: Feltrinelli, 1990.
5 C. Donati, 'Il problema delle generazioni nella storia e le sue origini settecentesche', in C. Mangio and M. Verga (eds), *Il Settecento di Furio Diaz*, Pisa: Pisa University, 2006, pp. 107–19.
6 The pertinence to youth of the idea of generation has repeatedly attracted historians: see, for example, the traditional survey by J. R. Gillis, *Youth and History: Tradition and Change in European Age Relations 1770–Present*, New York: Academic Press, 1974. The current approach is markedly different: see D. M. Pomfret, *Transnational Histories of Youth in the Twentieth Century*, Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015; M. K. Hall, *The Emergence of Rock and Roll: Music and the Rise of American Youth Culture*, London and New York: Routledge, 2014; M. Tebbutt, *Being Boys: Youth, Leisure and Identity in the Inter-War Years*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012; P. Dogliani (ed.), *Giovani e generazioni nel mondo contemporaneo*, Bologna: CLUEB, 2009.
7 F. Mentré, *Les générations sociales*, Paris: Bossard, 1920, p. 460.
8 D. S. Milo, *Trahir le temps (histoire)*, Paris: Belles Lettres, 1991.
9 P. Persano, 'Tempo, rivoluzione, costituzione: un bilancio storiografico', *Storica*, XI/31 (2005), p. 72; Persano, *La catena del tempo. Il vincolo generazionale nel pensiero politico francese tra Ancien Régime e rivoluzione*, Macerata: Università di Macerata, 2007.
10 Speech on the French Constitution to the National Convention, 24 April 1793, in A. Soboul (ed.), *Saint-Just. Discours et rapports*, Paris: Messidor/Éditions sociales 1988, pp. 94–108.
11 Quoted by P. Nora, 'Generation', in Nora (ed.), *Realms of Memory. Rethinking the French Past*, 3 vols, New York: Columbia University Press, 1996 (1st edn 1992), pp. 499–531, at p. 501.
12 S. Luzzatto, 'Young Rebels and Revolutionaries (1789–1917)', in G. Levi and J.-C. Schmitt (eds), *A History of Young People in the West*, 2 vols, Cambridge MA: Belknap Press, 1997 (1st edn 1994), pp. 147–231. For the subject of barricades, see the recent book by M. Traugott, *The Insurgent Barricade*, Berkeley, Los Angeles and San Francisco: University of California Press, 2011.
13 J. Dromel, *La loi des révolutions*, Paris: Didier, 1862; for Italy see G. Ferrari, *Teoria dei partiti politici*, Milan-Naples: Hoepli, 1874.
14 Dromel, *La loi*, pp. 164–7.
15 A. A. Cournot, *Considérations sur la marche des idées et des événements dans les temps modernes*, Paris: Hachette, 1872.
16 Agathon, *Les jeunes gens d'aujourd'hui*, Paris: 1912. See also M. Winock, 'Les générations intellectuelles', *Vingtième siècle. Revue d'histoire*, special number on 'Les générations', 22 (1989), pp. 17–38.

17 V. Giraud, *Les maîtres de l'heure: essais d'histoire morale contemporaine*, 2 vols, Paris: Hachette, 1911–14.
18 A. Thibaudet, *Histoire de la littérature française de 1789 à nos jours*, Paris: Stock, 1936. One should also note the influence of the art historian, Wilhelm Pinder, *Das Problem der Generation in der Kunstgeschichte Europas*, Berlin: Frankfurter Verlags-Anstalt, 1926.
19 H. Peyre, *Les générations littéraires*, Paris: Boivin, 1948. For Italy, see C. Dionisotti, 'La letteratura italiana nell'età del Concilio di Trento', in *Geografia e storia della letteratura italiana*, Turin: Einaudi, 1967, pp. 227–54; A. Battistini, 'I miti letterari della giovinezza alle soglie del Romaticismo', in A. Varni (ed.), *Il mondo giovanile in Italia fra Ottocento e Novecento*, Bologna: Il Mulino, 1998, pp. 11–39.
20 Y. Renouard, 'La notion de génération en histoire', *Revue Historique*, 209/1 (1953), pp. 1–23.
21 Cf. H. Jeschke, *Die Generation von 1898 in Spanien*, Halle: Niemeyer, 1934 and P. Laín Entralgo, *La generación del noventa y ocho*, Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1945; both are influenced by Julius Petersen, *Die literarischen Generationen*, Berlin: Junker and Dünnhaupt, 1930. See also G. Díaz Plaja, *Modernismo frente a noventa y ocho*, Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1951; J. L. Bernal Muñoz, *Invento o realidad? La generación española de 1898*, Valencia: Pre-textos, 1996; and, for an overview, C. P. Boyd, *Historia patria. Politics, History and National Identity in Spain 1875–1975*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997. For recent work on the Generation of 1898, see R. Johnson, '1898 entre el desencanto y la esperanza', *Hispania*, 84/2 (2001), pp. 227–8.
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23 J. Ortega y Gasset, *El tema de nuestro tiempo*, Madrid: Calpe, 1923; the theme was taken up again in a rather pedestrian way by his pupil J. Marías, *Generations: A Historical Method*, Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1970 (1st edn 1949).
24 His 1927 article, 'The Problem of Generations', can be found in K. Mannheim, *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge, Collected Works*, V, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1952, pp. 276–322. On Mannheim's concept of generation, see J. Pilcher, 'Mannheim's Sociology of Generations. An Undervalued Legacy', *British Journal of Sociology*, XLV/3 (1994), pp. 481–95.
25 Mannheim, 'Problem of Generations', p. 276.
26 Ibid., p. 278.
27 Ibid., pp. 280–6.
28 'It is a complete misconception to suppose as do most investigators that a real problem of generations exists only insofar as a rhythm of generations, recurring at unchanging intervals, can be established': Mannheim, 'Generations', p. 286.
29 Ibid., pp. 286–302.
30 Ibid., p. 309.
31 The reference here is to E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, New York: Vintage, 1963; *The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays*, London: Merlin, 1978; and, 'Eighteenth-Century English Society: Class Struggle without Class?', *Social History*, 3/2 (1978), pp. 133–65.
32 A. B. Spitzer, 'The Historical Problem of Generation', *American Historical Review*, LXXVIII/5 (1973), pp. 1353–85.
33 M. Bloch, *The Historian's Craft*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1952 (1st edn 1949).
34 L. Febvre, 'Générations', *Bulletin du centre internationale de synthèse. Section de synthèse historique*, n.7, published in *Revue de Synthèse Historique*, XLVII (1929), pp. 36–43, at p. 42.
35 Ibid., pp. 42–3.
36 S. N. Eisenstadt, *From Generation to Generation. Age Groups and Social Structure*, Glencoe IL: Free Press, 1956; see also his entry 'Générations' in *Encyclopaedia Universalis*, Paris: 1990, pp. 186–93.

37 See the entry 'Generazioni' ed. Alessandro Cavalli in *Enciclopedia delle Scienze sociali*, vol. IV, Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1994, pp. 237–8. See also I. Fazio and D. Lombardi (eds), *Generazioni. Legami di parentela tra passato e presente*, Rome: Viella, 2006.
38 S. Mitchell, *American Generations: Who They Are, How They Live, What They Think*, Ithaca and New York: New Strategist Publications, 2003.
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40 P. Ariès, 'Generazioni', in *Enciclopedia Einaudi*, vol. VI, Turin: 1979, pp. 557–63. In the same period Hans Jaeger published a critical survey of the subject 'Generationen in der Geschichte: Überlegungen zu einer umstrittenen Konzeption', *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 3 (1977), pp. 429–52; later republished in English as 'Generations in History: Reflections on a Controversial Concept', *History and Theory*, 24/3 (1985), pp. 273–92.
41 A. B. Spitzer, *The French Generation of 1820*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987. Spitzer had already tackled the same subject in his earlier *Old Hatreds and Young Hopes. The French Carbonari against the Bourbon Restoration*, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1971.
42 J. Fazy, *De la gérontocratie où Abus de la sagesse des vieillards dans le gouvernement de la France*, Paris: Delaforest, 1828; see, in general, J. Seigel, *Bohemian Paris. Culture, Politics and the Boundaries of Bourgeois Life 1830–1930*, New York: Viking, 1986.
43 Spitzer, *The French Generation*, p. 4. A more recent attempt to redefine the concept of a political generation is G. Bettin Lattes, 'Sul concetto di generazione politica', *Rivista Italiana di Scienza Politica*, I (1999), pp. 23–54.
44 'Comment les dogmas finissent', published as appendix to *Le Globe*, 24 May 1825.
45 Nora, 'Generation', p. 522.
46 S. Weigel, '"Generation" as a Symbolic Form: on the Genealogical Discourse of Memory since 1945', *Germanic Review*, 77/4 (2002), pp. 264–77.
47 Nora, 'Generation', p. 527.
48 See his book *On a raison de se révolter* written in collaboration with Pierre Victor (pseudonym of Benny Lévy) and Philippe Gavi, Paris: Gallimard, 1974.
49 E. Conan and H. Rousso, *Vichy, un passé qui ne passe pas*, Paris: Fayard, 1994.
50 Nora, 'Generation', p. 511. See, in general, Hervé Hamon and P. Rotman, *Générations*, 2 vols, Paris: Seuil, 1988; and S. Piccone Stella, *La prima generazione*, Milan: Franco Angeli, 1993.
51 The expression *géneration du feu* first appeared in France in the early 1920s. See the article by Bruno Cabanes in the issue 'Générations en guerre au XX siècle', ed. J. F. Sirinelli, *Revue Historique*, 641/1 (2007), pp. 139–50.
52 Entry for 10 August 1958 of the diary of a soldier, Jean Billard, cited in L. Bantigny, 'Temps, âge et génération à l'épreuve de la guerre: la mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli des appelés en Algérie', *Revue Historique*, 641/1 (2007), p. 168. The article was prompted by the appearance of the book by Roger Bove, *L'Algérie. Chronique d'une guerre oubliée, mémoirs d'une génération sacrifié. Correspondances algériennes de juillet à décembre 1962*, Paris: Ed. des Écrivains, 1998, and by the thoughts on temporality by the psychoanalyst André Green, *Le temps éclaté*, Paris: Minuit, 2000.
53 See, in general, P. Sorcinelli and A. Varni (eds), *Il secolo dei giovani, Le nuove generazioni e la storia del Novecento*, Rome: Donzelli, 2004.
54 Bantigny, 'Temps, âge et génération', p. 167.
55 R. Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Times*, Cambridge MA and London: MIT Press, 1985 (1st edn 1979); for Koselleck's conception of time related to the discourse of generation, see L. Scuccimarra, 'Generare il tempo. Discorso generazionale e semantica della temporalità', in L. Casella (ed.), *Generazioni familiari, generazioni politiche (XVIII–XX secc.)*, Rome: Bulzoni, 2010, pp. 37–64.
56 See the thoughts on trauma expounded by D. La Capra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001.

57 B. M. Berger, 'How Long Is a Generation?', *British Journal of Sociology*, 11/1 (1960), p.18. 'Anxious' refers here to W. Stegner, 'The Anxious Generation', *College English*, 10/4 (1949), pp. 183–8.
58 Nora, 'Generation', p. 509.
59 J.-F. Sirinelli, *Les baby-boomers: une génération 1945–69*, Paris: Fayard, 2003.
60 J. Chang, *Can't Stop, Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation*, New York: St Martin's Press, 2005.
61 The expression 'Lost Generation' was probably first used by Gertrude Stein in a conversation with Ernest Hemingway, and referred to the millions of young people killed in the First World War. The term became popular in the post-war period and was taken up by Maxine Davis for her book, *The Lost Generation* (London: Macmillan, 1936), dedicated to the generation which suffered during the Great Depression. See also H. Hatcher, 'The Second Lost Generation', *English Journal*, 25/8 (1936), pp. 621–31; and, on the 1914 generation, see R. Wohl, *The Generation of 1914*, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1979.
62 The expression 'Beat Generation' was coined by Jack Kerouac in 1948 in a discussion with Clive Holmes: 'You know, this is really a beat generation.' Holmes later pointed out that, with this expression, Kerouac wanted to evoke something more than sheer weariness but a sense of having been used and also of being inexpert and of not fitting in; a kind of nakedness of the soul. See also P. Tamony, 'Beat Generation, Beat, Beatniks', *Western Folklore*, 28/4 (1969), p. 274.
63 For a larger explanation of this point see the Introduction.
64 S. R. Suleiman, *Crises of Memory and the Second World War*, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2006.
65 M. Gluhovic, *Performing European Memories. Trauma, Ethics, Politics*, Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, pp. 174–231; M. Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2012; S. Kaiser, *Postmemories of Terror: A New Generation Copes with the Legacy of the 'Dirty War'*, Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.
66 P. Kivisto and D. Blanck, *American Immigrants and Their Generations: Studies and Commentaries on the Hansen Thesis after Fifty Years*, Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1990; the title refers to Marcus Lee Hansen, *The Problem of the Third Generation Immigrant*, Rock Island IL: Augustana Royal Society, 1938.
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68 J. Kisseloff, *Generation on Fire: Voices of Protest from the 1960s: An Oral History*, Lexington: Kentucky University Press, 2007.
69 T. A. Kohut, *A German Generation: An Experiential History of the Twentieth Century*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2012.

8

TERRORISM

A spectre is haunting the world – terrorism. Perhaps no single word has such a powerful and pervasive hold on the global public sphere, indicating as it now does a violent threat to civilization and to democracy posed by a barbarous disorder devoid of values. Under some aspects, terrorism might be seen as symbolizing the absolute evil of our times, the negative pole, represented once by the Devil. The pervasiveness of the term, which tends to be used metaphorically for other ills unconnected with political violence, is matched by its very vagueness, which may be seen not only in the media but also in scholarly use, where terrorism undoubtedly constitutes one of the most disputed concepts in the social sciences. Given the elusiveness of the concept, summed up in the hackneyed phrase that 'one person's terrorist is another person's freedom fighter', neither international organisms nor researchers in the field have been able to reach a consensus about what exactly 'terrorism' is.

Given the ambiguous and slippery nature of the term,[1] or perhaps because of it, there has been, especially after 9/11 and the Bush administration's declaration of the so-called 'global war on terror',[2] a strong tendency to reify the perpetrator of terror, the terrorist, and to indicate thereby a specific category of persons who are totally other, the enemy *par excellence*,[3] and who are progressively more closely identified with Islamic fundamentalism. The result is a recurrent tendency to make terrorism the distinguishing mark of the clash of civilizations which, at a theoretical level, is rejected but, implicitly or surreptitiously, re-enters discourse: the notion beneath this is of a structural diversity, based on the racial or religious and cultural characteristics of non-Western civilizations of peoples who, in Rudyard Kipling's words, are 'half devil and half child'.[4] This tendency has in some cases been taken to the point of seeking the original and self-explanatory basis of terrorism in religious, especially in Islamic, sacred texts and precepts: diversity is thus transformed into an irremediable and irredeemable ill.

In the media such identification can assume crude, not to say grotesque aspects whereby the general public is induced to see the terrorist as a young Arab in jeans and hoodie with a backpack. This blatant process of stereotyping, which reduces the terrorist to a single definition, obscures not only all the forms of contemporary terrorism which do not fit into the cliché, but the undeniable fact that the same general public a century ago had a very different notion of a terrorist: then he was perhaps seen as a bearded, European youth clad in a black cape and a broad-brimmed hat – in a word, he was an anarchist.

This restriction of the concept to the present-day situation and the resulting tendency to underplay the extent of terrorism's hold on the history of the West in the last two centuries partially depend on the scanty presence occupied by history in the field of terrorism studies.[5] This is a field of social research which has enormously expanded over the last decade and a half and in which various disciplines, such as political science, international relations and psychology, have, with a close eye on contingent political choices but sometimes with a rather limited critical capacity, elaborated theories aiming to define as exactly as possible what terrorism actually is. Given a 'persistent lack of historicity',[6] there has been a sort of competition to define the concept of 'terrorism', a hunt as it were, for the Holy Grail, explicitly intended to enable governments to devise strategies for combating it.[7] The overall tendency which has established itself is to identify terrorism by its methods and by its actual operational practices, and generally to avoid reference to its aims and motivations,[8] or else to reduce the phenomenon to concepts with an equally questionable capacity to provide explanations, such as 'extremism'[9] or 'fundamentalism'. Indeed, academic work has at times completely avoided a theoretical definition and has made do by defining terrorism in pragmatic terms; terrorism would supposedly be a self-evident phenomenon to be grasped empirically and intuitively and thus would simply consist in what, in the eyes of all, it would appear to be.[10] All such processes of simplification result from the attempt to give an unambiguous definition of terrorism, and to distinguish it clearly from other forms of non-conventional armed conflict (guerrilla warfare, 'partisan' warfare and civil war).[11] It is this line of thinking which led the great majority of scholars to identify terrorism with acts of violence committed with the deliberate intent of provoking widespread terror and of forcing the enemy to carry out actions which are in line with the political objectives of the terrorist group.[12] Hence terrorism equals the creation of terror.

The following argument aims to challenge this mainstream approach: it looks to the history of the intertwined concepts of terrorism and terror, and aims to show that the use of a historical approach requires us to revise established opinions and to adopt a perspective which is more critical, and less under the sway, of present-day concerns. Terrorism, conceived as a producer of terror, is actually indistinguishable from other, non-conventional forms of armed conflict, from which it can be differentiated only by the lower intensity of the actions which are carried out. When seen from this viewpoint, terrorism should be seen as part of the broader stream of violent political conflict and should be immersed in, not isolated from, the various forms of armed struggle in the past and today's world.

Moreover, a historically based analysis of the concept shows that defining a 'terrorist action' as directly targeting unarmed people, or at least non-combatants, which is how it progressively came to be understood after the 1980s, is restrictive and basically wrong. It would lead to excluding many armed attacks which in common parlance (and at times in scholarly texts) are generally defined as terrorist even though they are directed against military objectives.[13] On the other hand, far from being typical of terrorist actions, the involvement of the civilian population is absolutely central to all conceptions of insurgency and armed revolutionary struggle: both terrorism and insurgency are, as has been noted, 'forms of violence employed by non-state actors to further political objectives'.[14]

It needs also to be said that, while remaining within the concept of terrorism as the creation of terror, a 'terrorist' act is historically inseparable from the other tradition that theorized the methods judged efficacious in opposing and forestalling subversive acts and in countering 'terror with terror'. In other words, terrorism and counter-terrorism are, at the historical and conceptual level, closely linked and any attempt to separate them is merely fanciful. Both have their roots in the history of advanced European and North American societies and well may we say that terrorism is a plant which sprouted in a Western garden and was then disseminated throughout the world: it was not an exotic, 'alien' plant.

Finally, I will attempt to show that what we call terrorism contains something more than, and something different from, the mere goal of intimidation and the indiscriminate use of violence for political purposes. The 'something more' is the construction of an event generated by the terrorist act which is endowed with a highly symbolic content and which simulates total war, that is, the struggle between good and evil: terrorism is never without causes and never without a Cause.

1 Improbable definitions and unbelievable genealogies

The scholarly study of terrorism, as has been mentioned, is intended to assay a clear distinction between terrorism and other forms of political violence. The quest for knowledge underlying this goal has long been dominated by the need of governments and international organizations to establish which violent acts are to be defined as specifically terrorist, and to distinguish them both from acts of warfare and from simple crimes, however serious. There are obvious reasons for this concern to discriminate between them. For example, the recognition of enemy combatant status entails adopting protocols laid down by the Third Geneva Convention (1949) and so has consequences on the rules of detention, and on the possibilities of extradition. On the other hand, treating all terrorism as types of criminal activity has often been seen as reductive, above all because of the inconsistency and unreliability of terrorist profiling which was extensively trialled in the 1970s,[15] and in the following decade was abandoned in favour of a military-style response. Given this situation, the failure of international bodies to reach agreement on the subject led to a diplomatic impasse which highlighted the inability to find a common definition which would

place the phenomenon in a regulatory framework. As it is, the definitions contained in the legislation of various countries present a far from homogeneous picture.[16] The upshot is that one proceeds on a case-by-case basis,[17] and the term 'terrorist' is used according to the circumstances and the interests which are involved.[18]

The way in which a terrorist is defined varies considerably and is attuned to political considerations.[19] Both the protagonists of the famous Camp David Accords, Menachem Begin and Yasser Arafat, had previously been officially declared terrorists by governments in power before being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, which was also given to Nelson Mandela, who was held in gaol for 27 years as leader of a terrorist organization. The fact that the definition is at times clearly arbitrary may be seen in cases such as the Afghan mujahedin who, in 1985, were received at the White House by President Ronald Reagan and acclaimed as freedom fighters when they were fighting the Soviet invader, whereas the very same men, or similar groups, would later become 'terrorists' when they rose up against the American presence.[20]

Such semantic uncertainty is awash in political and government statements in the media. In reporting the attacks of 28 December 1985 on the airports of Rome and Vienna by the Palestinian Abu Nidal Organization, the *Financial Times* referred on the first page to 'terrorists' and 'bandits', and, on the second, to 'guerrillas' or 'urban guerrillas'.[21] And in the immediate aftermath of the attack on the Twin Towers, Reuters advised its reporters to avoid the term 'terrorists' because of its ambiguity and imprecision.[22]

Given this background, the problem of a scholarly definition for the term produced similar, and no less frustrating, results. A 1988 poll carried out among 200 scholars in the field produced a list of 109 different definitions of terrorism.[23] Some of the broader and more inclusive definitions, such as the one identifying it as 'the use of threat for the purposes of advancing a political, religious or ideological cause, of action which involves serious violence against any person or property',[24] or considering it as 'the unlawful use or threat of violence against persons or property to further political or social objectives',[25] were held to be inappropriate by many of those polled as definitions of this kind made it impossible to differentiate a terrorist act from other forms of violent political conflict such as a guerrilla action. Moreover, as has often been noted, the definitions referred to violent actions carried out by non-institutional actors and hence failed to pose the question of 'terrorism from above' or 'state terrorism',[26] whereas, notoriously, it is historically established that state entities and governments have deliberately spread terror among both enemy populations and their own.[27]

There is the further question of the political and moral judgements which make their way into scholarly discourse and undermine its credibility and impartiality.[28] This is a tendency which is accentuated when one is confronted by the difficulty of distinguishing acts of terrorism from acts of insurgency, and the difficulty is exacerbated by the fact that those actually involved in insurgency themselves, to a greater or lesser extent, operate in a way considered as 'terrorism'. The basic cause of the problem is that 'terrorism' is a 'social construction, which is relative to time and

place, thus to historical context. It is not a neutral descriptive term.'[29] It is both a political and moral label and a legal one, and is often a derogatory term applied by governments to delegitimize hostile forces and groups.[30] Hence we are led to ask who calls what terrorism, why and when.

> Since 'terrorism' is a political label, it is an organizing concept that both describes the phenomenon as it exists and offers a moral judgment. A label is a useful shorthand, combining descriptive, evocative, and symbolic elements but its meanings are inherently flexible and ambiguous. They may even be contradictory.[31]

It is not fortuitous that Edward Said has written about 'politically laden' theories and has referred to scholars working in the field as 'terror cabalists'.[32]

A further difficulty arises from the fact that, from among the various forms of armed political conflict, it is not possible to isolate 'terrorism' as specifically a type of violent action which is carried out with intimidatory intentions and which targets a civilian or non-combatant population. This is the position adopted by both the American State Department,[33] and the UN,[34] but it is perfectly obvious that there are other forms of armed conflict that envisage the involvement of an unarmed population. Even excluding the extreme case of civil war, both revolutionary and counter-insurgency theories focus firmly on the objective of gaining control, by means of fear or engagement, of the political leanings of citizens. As for war in the classic sense, even when it falls this side of 'total war', it is quite prepared to 'demoralize' the enemy by spreading terror among its population.

Confronted by this situation, scholarly work has prevalently chosen not to explore in depth the semantic ambiguity inherent in the concept and term 'terrorism' and, above all, has avoided analysing the concept in historical terms, with the result that, as has been noted, 'no good history of Terrorism exists'.[35] Thinking on the subject has been concentrated on the present, and the past has been used in an arbitrary, anachronistic and at times bizarre way.

One of the most blatant misuses of history is the attempt to construct what might be called implicit religious genealogies of terrorism. In both academic studies and in textbooks on the subject, it is more than common, indeed seems almost obligatory, to come across references to ancient traditions which, with their basis in religion, are supposedly original roots of the phenomenon.[36] There are three cases which are most frequently cited. The first concerns the Sicarii.[37] In the first century AD, the resistance movement opposing Roman rule in Palestine was led by a group of Jewish zealots. Their preferred mode of action was political assassination carried out by militants, known in Latin as Sicarii.[38] Their story was to have great influence in Jewish cultural tradition, leaving its mark on Jewish collective imagination and assuming special importance in the early 1940s when Jewish groups of Zionist inspiration such as Haganah and Irgun began to use terrorist tactics to attack British troops in Palestine which had become a British Mandate after the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire.[39] What is far from clear is why, apart from Jewish self-perception,

this distant precedent should have been chosen from all of history, and why it is cited by texts which set out to study terrorism objectively.

The second repeatedly cited historical example is the sect of the Assassins, the name of a medieval heretical grouping of Nizari Ismailis, who formed part of Shia Islam.[40] The sect's militants – who owed allegiance to their leader, a legendary charismatic figure called the 'Old Man of the Mountain', and who later became a mythical figure in the Western *imaginaire* – targeted leading figures among their enemies, such as Caliphs and Viziers. Here too, the reasons why the doings of this group are so frequently discussed in scholarly literature with the aim of 'throwing light' on the roots of modern terrorism remain more than a little obscure. Although they fought against the Crusaders, in whom they struck fear, the Nizari Ismailis were in fact a dissident, heretical minority who fought against the hegemony of Sunni Seljuk: there is reason to believe that, if the Mongols had not destroyed their bases in the middle of the fourteenth century, they would have fought even the Ottoman Empire.[41] The fact remains that they are commonly written about, with another leap forward of several centuries, as the forerunners of Jihadi groups or even of IS terrorists.

The Thugs are the third example which is frequently mentioned in writings about terrorism. They were a legendary Hindu sect of worshippers of the goddess Kali, who were 'discovered' and subjected to repression in the 1830s. Their reputed *modus operandi* was to attack unwitting travellers in north-eastern India, murder them and then steal their possessions, some of which were then given to the goddess so as to curry her favour.[42] Their presence among the historical examples most frequently cited as lying at the base of modern terrorism is even more baffling than in the case of the Sicarii and the Assassins. The banditry activities practised by the so-called Thugs, a word which originally indicated simply robbers, were motivated by venal, not political, motives. This is not to mention that modern studies on the subject agree in denying that they formed a sect at all, far less a religious sect.[43]

The creation of this curious array of examples, which is uncritically repeated, is based on the idea of a precedent. Thus, the Irgun and the Stern gang supposedly acted in a way similar to the Sicarii despite the fact that 18 centuries had passed. Similarly, and again after an interval of centuries, the Assassins would somehow constitute a precedent for terrorist organizations such as Hamas – this pays scant heed to the fact that the former were Shiites and were opposed to Sunni dominance and to the Caliphate which some radical groups are now striving to restore. As for the Thugs, they supposedly foreshadow Sikh terrorism, which is not only based in Punjab distant 2,000 kilometres from where the Thugs operated, but has quite different origins and causes.

Such an arbitrary selection, which puts one in mind of an exotic theory of the reincarnation of terrorism based on religious radicalism, could legitimately lead one to suspect an ideological intent. Three great religions are adduced for their underlying fanaticism, which in turn is posited as an explanation of terrorism: there is no mention of Christianity, which implicitly leads us to suppose that it is not a religion given to fanatical radicalism and hence to generating terrorism. One may obviously

choose to dissent from this judgement.[44] In all events, as has been observed, this problematic treatment of history is not only anachronistic (in that it uses present-day criteria to interpret actions which were carried out in quite different contexts and which had different meanings) but also seriously undermines the understanding of 'present-day terrorism'.[45]

Apart from these decidedly odd reconstructions, history, as has been pointed out, has little space in the thousands of entries making up the enormous bibliography on terrorism.[46] The only attempt to apply a historical perspective sought to identify, on the basis of the well-known theory of cycles of collective actions, five periods, or waves of terrorist violence, each lasting about 45 years and characterized by different ideologies and methods: the phase marked by anarchism of 1880–1920; by nationalism and its struggle with socialism up to the 1940s; by decolonization up to the 1960s; by urban terrorism; and finally the last phase, marked by fundamentalist Islamic terrorism.[47] Setting aside questions of the validity of this theory of cycles of collective action, such a perspective, while it has the merit of 'taking account' of the historical span of collective terrorist violence, has the drawback of understanding terrorism to mean essentially the creation of terror and of not including the theorization of counter-terrorism, that is, terror as a means for combating 'revolutionary terrorism'.

Moreover, the work tends to underestimate the elements of continuity which can be detected in the history of the concepts 'terror' and 'terrorism', and in their accompanying practices. The following paragraphs will attempt to indicate some of these continuities as used both for 'revolutionary' and for 'counter-revolutionary' purposes. We are here dealing with continuities over time but also with worldwide propagations; ideas about 'terror' and 'terrorism', along with techniques and worldviews, travelled both in time and space. These ideas are concerned with how 'terrorism' may or may not advance the cause of revolution, how people's 'heads and hearts' are won over, and how terrorism may constitute a surrogate for war, or its continuation, by using other means.

2 Revolutionary terrorism

Although traditions of political resistance and opposition may be traced back as far as the American experience in the latter part of the eighteenth century and even before the War of Independence,[48] the expression 'terrorist', as the concept and term 'terrorism', came into existence with the French Revolution.[49] Both labels were applied, after Thermidor (27 July 1794), to persons and practices of a past regime which needed to be repudiated, and hence called 'The Terror'. They indicated a decisive move away from the practice of summary justice and widespread violence which had marked the first two years of Republican rule, and especially the months of total domination by the Jacobins followers of Robespierre. The reference to 'terror' specifically derived from the condemnation of the policy which was willing, in order to save the Revolution from the concentrated attack of the external enemy (foreign armies) and the internal enemy (anti-Republican

conspiracy), to 'put terror on the agenda'. That is, it resolved to impose extreme measures of security to safeguard the 'safety of the people' and to eradicate the counter-revolutionary threat, which were tantamount to eliminating political enemies by judicial means and by a widespread use of the guillotine. The Thermidor leaders, once Robespierre and his close supporters had been eliminated, later took to referring to them retrospectively as Jacobins, *Montagnards*, but also terrorists, the better to stigmatize their actions, and, more abstractly, to condemn their political policy as 'terrorism'. In one of his speeches delivered in the Thermidor days Jean-Lambert Tallien (29 August 1794) again took up the expression 'system of terror', which had already been used reciprocally as an accusation in the factional struggle between Girondins and Jacobins to delegitimize and discredit one another, in order to condemn the former regime. In his speech, which also made use of the word 'terrorism', Tallien accused Robespierre's period of rule of having created generalized fear. All governments threaten to punish those who break the law, he maintained, and this fear which authority communicates is legitimate. However, something different had occurred; people had been threatened with the most cruel of all threats – the loss of life – and so a state of permanent terror had been created among the people. With Tallien's intervention, a sizeable gap was created between two notions of terror: one had the declared goal of directly targeting specific individuals, and the other the genuine goal of using fear to control the whole populace.[50] The nub of his accusation was that the ostensible target was part of a despotic design which knowingly, that is, strategically, used terror to gain absolute control.[51]

In the following years, it was on these bases that the debate on 'terrorism', which was to dominate the first half of the nineteenth century, was structured. At one level it was a condemnation of the extreme ills of despotism, and here the point of reference was the classical tradition of tyrannicide.[52] Even in the course of the Revolution there had been Marat's murder, accompanied by the anti-tyrannical rhetoric of its perpetrator, Charlotte Corday, but now, with the condemnation of Robespierre, the subject returned centre-stage. Those seen as 'terrorists' were, generally speaking, those who abused their own power, plunged people into a permanent state of war and fear, and hence were considered the modern equivalent of tyrants. However, the most radical wing of the Jacobins, with its emblematic figures Gracchus Babeuf and Filippo Buonarroti, did not accept such a definition and began to assail the government's demonizing use of the term 'terrorist', an insult directed against the 'true patriots' who had suffered repression under the unscrupulous rule of the Directorate which, while attacking 'terrorists', was itself using terrorist methods.[53] This explains why they were by no means averse to claiming for themselves the label of 'terrorists', thus following the historical example of disparaging or mocking political labels which were later adopted by political groups as was the case with the Huguenots, Gueux and Frondeurs. What was operative in both cases was the legitimization and delegitimization of state political violence.

As well as such anti-tyrannical language, the French Revolution also produced a revival of the 'nations' in Europe which was due both to the spread of the

revolutionary notion of an entity, the 'people as nation' endowed with the right to sovereignty and to the armed resistance to French invasions in Spain, Germany, Russia and the Tyrol. These resistance movements were motivated both by their demands for national independence and by their defence of the Christian religion. This stance of 'national' resistance to the invasion by Napoleonic troops was also one of cultural resistance, along clerical or reactionary lines, to the new 'revolutionary' ideas. At the military level, this resistance found expression in revitalizing what eighteenth-century military theorists called 'little wars' and which now began to be known as 'guerrilla warfare', using a term deriving from the Spanish resistance. It is this context, enriched by Carl von Clausewitz's thinking on war, which laid the ground for Carl Schmitt's celebrated reflections on 'partisan' war and on its combatants, who are ideologically motivated and rooted in their own soil, as opposed to the combatants of a regular army.[54]

The spread of guerrilla warfare in Europe was preceded by an event which in today's eyes seems highly significant: the Egyptian resistance to Bonaparte's expedition of 1798. The very day after landing in Alexandria on 1 July he was wounded by an Arab sniper. From the start the expedition encountered widespread hostility and, even after their victory in the Battle of the Pyramids, the French troops were subjected to continual attacks and acts of sabotage. In September the Caliph declared a Jihad against the infidel invaders and the rallying cry for an uprising issued by the Ulema led on 21 October to a full-scale insurrection which forced Napoleon to bomb the city of Al Azhar and its mosque, the spiritual heart of the resistance. Despite the victories won by General Desaix against the forces of Murad Bey, for all the time they were in Egypt the French troops were subjected to ceaseless harassment. The armed resistance was relentless and even leading to the assassination of General Kléber (Napoleon's successor on his return to France) who was killed by a Moslem fanatic acting on orders issued by Turkish officers resident in Syria.[55]

The two strands of resistance to despotism, one connected to classic tyrannicide and the other relying on guerrilla methods and the people's active engagement in opposing a foreign oppressor, merged in the Risorgimento, Italy's movement of national liberation. This developed in the conspiratorial climate of Masonic-style associations such as the *carboneria* and in groups of republican orientation. This was a significant transition as it was a necessary stage in fusing the evolution of the concepts of 'terror' and 'terrorism' during the French Revolution with later anarchist theorizing of 'propaganda by the deed'.[56] The great upsurge in the tradition of tyrannicide was Italian, as is evidenced by Fieschi's attack on Philippe d'Orléans (1835) and Orsini's on Napoleon III (1858). The latter attack, which created an enormous stir, was the textbook model of a terrorist attack, facilitated by the invention of the fuseless bomb, which was subsequently called an 'Orsini bomb'.

Giuseppe Mazzini's thoughts on armed resistance were also significant – while not excluding tyrannicide, they stressed the importance of popular uprising, and revolution. Mazzini's thoughts on the war of armed bands (along with those of Giuseppe La Masa,[57] who applied Bianco di Saint-Jorioz's theories on guerrilla

warfare to the Italian situation)[58] lay behind both the ill-fated Sapri expedition led by Carlo Pisacane, and Giuseppe Garibaldi's victorious expedition which brought about the unification of the country. The idea behind these expeditions of volunteers was that they should be initiated by a small nucleus of insurgents, the action (according to Pisacane having precedence over ideas)[59] which would provide a signal to the popular masses waiting for the moment to rebel against the regime. This nationalistic tradition, which was also democratic and republican, flowed into the nascent anarchist movement which, after the Paris Commune, was swollen by former Mazzinians.

Hence there is a thread of concepts linking the notion of democratic, nationalist insurrections to the anarchist thrust towards a social revolution which aimed at a different kind of solution but was premised on popular action or what Alexander Herzen called 'going to the people'. Attempts to theorize brutal terrorist attacks, as was done by Karl Heinzen (1849), are clearly related to this tradition.[60] The Banda del Matese episode (1877), an anarchist attempt to organize a small armed band in the countryside near Benevento which aimed to incite a revolt among the plebs of southern Italy, was in line with the Sapri expedition, and among those taking part, as well as the Italians Errico Malatesta and Carlo Cafiero, there was also Stepniak Kravchinsky, who founded the Russian movement *Zemlia i Volia* (Land and Liberty). Both movements followed the same line of thought, which was later summed up in the programmatic slogan 'propaganda by the deed', formulated by Paul Brousse and by the group of Italian anarchists and finally sanctioned in 1881 by the Tenth Congress of the Anti-authoritarian International in London.

Amorphous, lethargic, illiterate masses needed an exemplary feat to shake them from their servile state and to incite them to rebel against their oppressor (whether foreigner or boss).[61] The verbal or written propaganda of ideas proved inadequate and hence needed to be flanked by practical propaganda, that is, a revolutionary act which would incite the masses to revolt.[62] In Kropotkin's words it was essential 'to rouse their boldness and rebellious spirit by teaching through example'.[63] Illegal acts provoke the authorities to apply repression and, in reaction, this leads to a series of other illegal and heroic acts; one act would generate another and this would lead to the active engagement of more people, up to the point of a general revolution.[64] In the words of Francesco Saverio Merlino:

> not by legal methods, not by more or less universal suffrage, not by taking part in elections but by 'propaganda by the deed', by clandestine publications, and above all by agitation in the countryside; by the use of all the means which chemical and technical science give us to struggle against our adversaries.[65]

Alongside theorization of 'propaganda by the deed', which became a tenet of the Anarchist International at the end of the nineteenth century throughout Europe and in the USA, the anti-tyrannical tradition experienced a period of effulgence and a kind of feverish succession of attacks which highlighted the dramatic state of the 'social question'. The culling of crowned heads which continued from the last two

decades of the nineteenth century until the First World War, exposed internal differences within the anarchist movement which were accentuated by the breach between Mikhail Bakunin and Sergey Nechayev over the so-called Revolutionary Catechism. Bakunin notoriously distanced himself from Nechayev's doctrine of absolute dedication to the revolutionary cause, which he repudiated as a form of Jesuitism and as an unacceptable call for blind obedience to the revolutionary organization. A whole thread of anarchist thought, which in Russia blended with populism (the populist Vera Zasulich, who dubbed herself a terrorist, had been close to Nechayev, who also defined himself in this way) and with so-called nihilism, which was under the influence of the ideas of Max Stirner, of Friedrich Nietzsche and of Social Darwinism, glorified individual acts of heroism against the system and the use of dynamite (invented by Alfred Nobel in 1867) as weapons of democracy able to break the shackles of state oppression.[66] Such 'propaganda by the deed', a phrase which originally designated an act of insurrection, under populist and *narodniki* influences extended its meaning to include political assassination.[67] In the most radical wing of the revolutionary movement, another German emigrant to the USA, Johann Most, employed extreme language to theorize and justify 'terrorist' acts as a means of legitimate defence against the murderous state.[68] Other strands of the fragmented anarchist movement, including Prince Kropotkin, while continuing to support political assassination, turned against the idea of the 'terrorist' act as the sole means of revolutionary action and of mass illegality.

The turn towards 'terrorism' taken by the anarchist movement was actively fomented by police authorities who, next to the Commune, considered anarchism to be the most serious threat to governments in power. Using old and tried methods employed by the police of despotic European regimes – provocation, spying, deliberate misdirection, manipulation – the anarchist movement was massively infiltrated by those working to construct a public enemy, the anarchist, as 'creator of terror'.[69] In France the Prefect of Police, Louis Andrieux, secretly financed the first French anarchist newspaper, *La Révolution sociale*, which was started in 1880 by the most famous *agent provocateur* of the time, the Belgian policeman Égide Spilleux, also known as Serreaux or Genlis. The short-lived publication was, according to Kropotkin, 'awash with unbelievable violence', and was the first to publish instructions on how to make a bomb.[70]

Andrieux would later boast of having prompted the first anarchist attack in France, which targeted the statue of Adolphe Thiers, the 'butcher' of the Paris Commune, in Saint Germaine de Laye. In similar vein, the Okhrana, the Russian political police, especially under the leadership of Sergei V. Zubatov between 1896 and 1904, enlisted populist or social revolutionary militants and turned them into secret agents, as in the case of the well-known leader of the maximalists of the Russian Socialist-Revolutionary Party, Yevno Azef.[71] The Prussian police also made use of *agents provocateurs* to such an extent that the Most group was completely infiltrated;[72] in Italy, hired agents posed as anarchists, one example being Carlo Terzaghi, editor of the newspaper *Il Proletario*, who was expelled by the International as a police spy.[73]

These years of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were the heyday of the worldwide spread of anarchism. Recent work on anarchism has stressed both the propagation of anarchist ideas in North and South America as a result of massive overseas emigration,[74] but also the success of anarchism as a global, radical series of networks, a world radical movement whose appeal lay in the adaptability of its ideas both to uprisings in favour of independence and to social revolts.[75] In the wake of European emigration, anarchist circles sprang up all over the world and this seemingly uncheckable process of dissemination of ideas and also of the tenet of 'propaganda by the deed'. The 'terrorist' interpretation which Russian populists gave to the struggle against Czarist autarchy spread, for example, to the Polish Socialist Party with the result that 'armed action' became the guiding principle of the party led by Jozef Pilsudski. In the Ottoman Empire, as well, the spread of anarchist and socialist ideas led from the 1890s to a selective adoption of their principles to give expression to self-determination movements such as the Macedonians of IMRO, who, like the Armenians, used 'terrorism' as a means of provoking European powers to intervene against the Ottoman Empire, following the example of Bulgaria (which had gained its independence in 1878).[76] Against the Ottoman Empire, the Armenian nationalist movement, the Dashnak Party, conducted a struggle which drew inspiration from Russian populism and the Narodnaja Volja. Moreover, anarchist ideas reached as far as Japan and China; we know that a group of Chinese intellectuals, Li Shizeng, Cai Yuanpei and, above all, Chu Minyi, emigrated to Paris, where they came under the strong influence of anarchist ideas and, on their return to China, formed the nucleus of the Kuomintang.

As for the spread of anarchist ideas in the British Empire, one should note the extraordinary importance of the example provided by the Irish struggle for independence which repeatedly turned to 'terrorist' actions. Interestingly, terrorism, under Bal Gangadhar Tilak, which was widespread in Bengal at the end of the nineteenth century borrowed techniques from the Irish resistance, Mazzinian-style conspiracies, and conspiratorial techniques adopted in the Russian *narodnik* movement.[77] The Bengalis actually used the expression 'the Russian method' for terrorist operations. British authorities were comprehensibly aghast at the similarity of their fighting methods to those used in Ireland, which included the killing of key figures in the administration.[78]

3 Insurgency and counter-insurgency

The First World War and the October Revolution marked a crucial turning point in the history of the concept of 'terrorism' for two fundamental reasons: the theory of 'total' war, and the question which had arisen within the socialist movement of the relationship between the political vanguard and the masses. The two questions were closely interrelated.

One of the key points in the German General Ludendorff's reflections on 'total war' had considerable relevance for the question of 'terrorism' because of his approach to the involvement of the civil population. When, alongside Marshal

Paul von Hindenburg, he was commander of German forces in the First World War, he had theorized and put into practice close cooperation between the military and industrial apparatus. Basing himself on his own experience, he accepted the notion of the *Dolchstosslegende*, that is, the legend of the 'stab in the back', which saw Germany's defeat as brought about by political failure and by the failure of part of the German people to bear the full burden of the war.[79] For Ludendorff, military defeat was the result of a political inability to create the psychological unity of the German people which would have required adopting inevitable solutions such as food rationing and other restrictions imposed by war, seen as a nation's utmost expression. Productive structures needed to be integrated into the conduct of war and hence factories also needed to be seen as essential parts of a military productive cycle. In practice this meant placing the civilian population on the same footing as the fighting forces: hence it was essential to target the enemy's productive and logistic system with the aim of paralyzing their operation. Moreover, targeting the civilian population served to lower enemy morale and to weaken their resistance.

In the same period the Bolshevik triumph of October 1916 opened an intense debate which left its mark on the European Socialist Movement. For many of them, Lenin's successful wresting of power belied the Marxist theory of the need for congruence among the stage of development of the forces of production, a corresponding degree of maturity in class consciousness, and the outbreak of revolution as an element inherent in the natural evolution of societies. Lenin's success had instead shown that decisive action by an enlightened vanguard was able to guide the people and to urge them towards a socialist future. However, for an orthodox Marxist, such as Karl Kautsky, this meant betraying orthodoxy in favour of Lenin's theory which had led the Russian Revolution to 'terror'. In his famous analysis, *Terrorism and Communism* (1919), Kautsky gave a masterly exposition of the split then dividing the socialist movement. He pointed out that, until the outbreak of the war, it was universally accepted that the time of revolutions had passed. However, 'now we have the Revolution with us, and it is taking on forms of barbarity, which even the most fantastic of revolutionary romancers could scarce have expected':[80] it had brought with it the most bloody terrorism. The crucial point was the relationship between the vanguard and the masses: for Kautsky, revolutions succeeded when they were driven by the masses while an 'upheaval which has to be fomented by the leaders, instead of these latter being forced from below, is a sign that the necessary driving force is wanting and that the whole movement is doomed to failure'.[81] The lapse of a revolution into terrorism is a sign of its defeat and of the victory of an approach which is not truly Marxist but is rooted in Blanquism and voluntarism.[82] In a closely argued comparison of the French Revolution, the Paris Commune and current events in Russia, Kautsky accused the Bolshevik leadership of taking refuge in dictatorship and of having recourse to state terrorism. As for Lenin, 'if we are not anarchists we accept the fact that the State as such is necessary, that is, we accept the need for compulsion in the period of transition from Capitalism to Socialism'.[83] Put simply, compulsion is terror and derives from a concept typical of the Bolshevik ruling class of

revolution as a cruel civil war, as a dictatorship which the minority necessarily imposes on the majority:

> As we have only the two alternatives – democracy or civil war – I myself draw the conclusion that wherever Socialism does not appear to be possible on a democratic basis, and where the majority of the population rejects it, its time has not yet fully come.[84]

Lev Trotsky responded to these accusations in an article which should have been called *In Defence of Terrorism*, but at the end bore the same title as Kautsky's contribution, *Terrorism and Communism*. In this Trotsky demolished Kautsky's position by accusing him of being a kind of Girondine, which, to Trotsky's thinking, meant a counter-revolutionary, that is, a person who has fundamentally failed to grasp the lesson of 1793: that it was the Terror which alone had saved the French Revolution. If the problem is to get rid of a reactionary class which refuses to quit the scene, then terror is useful; every revolution is a civil war and victory relies on intimidation. Red terror cannot be distinguished from armed insurrection, of which it is an extension. Hence it is senseless to compare Bolshevik with Czarist terror, as the latter was used against the proletariat whereas the former is applied against the enemies of the people: land owners, capitalists and officials in the previous regime.[85]

If the First World War (and the Bolshevik Revolution) must be considered as watersheds in the history of the concept of 'terrorism', it is also because it was in that same period that ideas and techniques of armed resistance achieved global diffusion. This was partly due to the actual dynamics of war with techniques of guerrilla warfare. The leading figures in this were two extraordinary European adventurers: Major Oskar von Niedermayer who, in the period between 1915 and 1917 attempted to foment anti-British resistance in Persia and Afghanistan,[86] and Thomas E. Lawrence, the famous Lawrence of Arabia, who in 1917–18 organized on behalf of Britain the Arab revolt against Ottoman rule in the area including Palestine, Syria and Arabia. The influence of both men was considerable: Niedermayer was a leader in the debate of what became known as *geopolitics*,[87] and we owe to Lawrence a thorough, theoretical rethinking of guerrilla warfare, which was not only a type of war where there was either no front or a multiplicity of fronts but which offered the possibility of using one's own initiative to shift the strategic axis of the conflict and thus making areas inconsequential where the enemy was present in force and was well positioned. Tactics are elevated to the level of strategy, adapting to the conditions of the desert terrain and of the nomadic tribes engaged in the fighting. The guerrilla in the desert operates like a pirate on water using his raiding parties to turn time and rapidity of action into his allies. Above all, this type of fighting relies on attempting to sway the morale of fighters and of their enemies. The support of the local population must be won over: provided a guerrilla war has the backing of a large majority of the people, it is enough that a tiny minority, as low as two per cent, is directly engaged in the fighting.[88]

The themes of total war and of control over the civilian population were linked, after the victorious Chinese Long March, when anticolonial resistance exploded with the worldwide spread of guerrilla warfare. In the works of the major theorists of mass popular insurrection, such as Mao Tse-tung, Nasution, Giap and Truong Chinh, guerrilla warfare also became total war, or, in Mao's words, the war of an entire people who become the eyes and ears of the people's army, its source of sustenance and means of protection during combat and acts of sabotage and, in a metaphor which was to become famous, the water in which the revolutionary army moves like a fish.

This will be repeated by Ernesto 'Che' Guevara in his introduction (1964) to the Cuban edition of the writings of General Giap where he wrote that 'the extremely difficult art of waging a people's war' calls for dynamism, initiative, mobility, snap decisions in the face of new situations but above all that it is a war based on the mass struggle:

> guerrilla war is nothing else than a mass struggle and cannot be isolated from its natural resource, that is, the people; in this case, guerrilla warfare indicates a numerically inferior outpost and the great majority of the people, who do not possess weapons, but whose vanguard is the element which expresses their will to triumph.[89]

Guevara went on to stress the importance of the tenet, laid down by Giap, of 'armed propaganda', that is, that the popular army needs to make itself seen and that such visibility guarantees its hold on the people: 'armed propaganda is simply the presence of the liberation forces in specific zones which is intended to demonstrate both the power they have and their invincibility'.[90]

The relationship between the vanguard and the masses was the main subject of debate within the international socialist movement. Writing in 1956, in the immediate aftermath of the Twentieth Congress of the USSR, Mao distanced himself from the 'personality cult', and used the occasion for a more general attack on 'the unwarranted exaltation of individuals and the type of individual heroism which moves away from the masses'. Mao found it convenient to recall his own celebrated words of 1 June 1943 on the subject of the guidance of the masses and the need to fight against what was called 'subjectivism'. What was needed to counter such tendencies was 'to start from the masses so as to return to them'.[91] This was the tenet called the 'mass line' which prescribed that ideas and information collected from among the people should be elaborated by the party and then communicated back to the masses to be applied and concretely tested.

However, with Guevara, greater emphasis in Latin America came to be given to the theory of the guerrilla *foco* as theorized by Régis Debray,[92] that is, action which, in keeping with voluntarist ideas rooted in the Leninist tradition, calls for the outbreak of armed struggle to come from a chosen vanguard which is able to interpret and articulate the suffering and the yearning for liberation of the popular masses.

The Second World War created a new and enormous vehicle for the spread of 'terrorist' methods, which at the end of the war fused with the process of decolonization, and with the beginning of a new war fought far away from the front, the Cold War. There was a growing awareness of the centrality of the political, rather than the strictly military, nature of insurgence, and of the fact that 'wars of subversion and counter subversion are fought, in the last resort, in the minds of the people'.[93]

One striking document in the new context of the Cold War involving a new approach to the subject of 'terror' was an amazing 1952 report, of uncertain provenance, which was claimed to be the work of Soviet Intelligence and even 'a product of Communist theory', but which may in fact have been 'fabricated' by a 'Western Intelligence Officer'.[94] Despite the fact that we lack information on its readership, the report nevertheless gave the clearest and most explicit formulation of ideas then circulating in security agencies about what terror is and how it can be employed in the event of a declared or an undeclared war. Once the active element of the enemy to be targeted has been identified, the function of terrorism is to subject the entire population to intimidation 'in order to establish the conditions for the destruction of one part of the population'.[95] Violence needs to be employed piecemeal so as to create a 'psychological shock' and subsequently a 'shaky frame of mind', that is, a profound psychosis which leads to paralysis among active enemy elements. As the report pointed out, the drawback of this strategy was that, over time, the enemy becomes used to living in fear and this diminishes the effects of the strategy of terror,[96] breeds hatred and aversion, and often leads to civil war.

But there is another form of terror, called in the text enlightened terror, which acts in a far subtler way. The active player does not disclose himself but remains hidden and 'acts and applies terror not in his own name but in the name of his opponent'. This principle is called the 'camouflage maneuver'.[97] The *modus operandi* of enlightened terror is aimed at influencing the social environment of the country being targeted in such a way as to transform it into a spontaneous means of support. So the use of infiltration can lead to the creation of organizations which operate under a false guise and pretend to have functions quite different from their own or even functions of the enemy. An infiltrator, rather than being simply a spy, plays the role of a Trojan horse:

> His rightful duty, regardless of his position, is to create a focus of chronic internal and external conflict within the enemy camp. He operates dogmatically and with ruthless fanaticism, in the name of the well-being of the opponent, supporting himself on the opponent's ideological principles.[98]

This is basically an active perspective on 'psychological warfare' mixed with other, tried and tested, non-conventional methods of war and centred on the principle of an 'instigation object', that is, an action aimed at provoking a reaction. In all cases the goal is to sway the orientation of public opinion, which is given the scientific-sounding

name of 'resonant mass'.[99] In order to influence this mass, it may be necessary to target it with violent and terrorist acts which, obviously, are camouflaged. However, this may not suffice. Despite being camouflaged, the action may be attributed not to those claiming responsibility but to those who gain a clear advantage. This brings us to the end point of this way of thinking: manipulating public opinion may make it necessary, in order to strengthen or create opinions favourable to the subject, to direct the covert unit to target the subject's own objectives: 'in the system of enlightened terror one should sooner make an attack on an object of one's own than on an object of the resonant mass. As long as the conflict continues, losses of one's own are unavoidable.'[100] These strategies, created in a time of war, were later applied during the Cold War when 'terror' and 'terrorism' converged in the quest for dominating minds.

At the same time, the victory of the Long March and the start of the process of decolonization provoked in the West anxious questions about the reasons why enormous masses, especially of peasants, were adhering to communist ideology. In France, which was reeling from the defeat at Dien Bien Phu, the loss of Indochina (1954) and the later withdrawal from Algeria (1959–60), the most radical rethinking on 'terror' as a means of combat made unprecedented advances. This was theorizing Revolutionary War, that is, ideological and political warfare distinct from both traditional war and from partisan war. This is not to be confused with guerrilla war, which is a military tactic, whereas a revolutionary war is a political war which aims at conquering a population. It is not principally fought by soldiers but by soldier-militants engaged in a total ideological struggle. Fighting such a war therefore requires that they can avail themselves of what Charles Lacheroy, one of the theoreticians of the new doctrine, called *l'action psychologique*. This is not merely propaganda but the ability to use all sources of information, even false information, to manipulate collective emotions and to implant a public sense of guilt into suitable scapegoats. It takes advantage of the psychological effects of fear to create favourable shifts in public opinion. A decisive role was played in this thinking by the battle for Algiers in which the paratroopers, under general Massu, reacted to the 'terrorism' of the Algerian resistance by creating their own system of terror, which included the widespread use of torture to extort confessions from prisoners and to gain information about their organizational structures, the formation of special units whose job was to make their opponents 'disappear', and the use of techniques of disinformation.[101] It is worth noting that the first attack intended to create terror, that is, indiscriminately targeted at a civilian population, was carried out by Massu's troops who on 10 August 1956 placed a bomb in a building in rue de Thebes where it was thought that there might be 'terrorists'. This was a turning point: henceforth Algerian fighters, who until then had targeted only soldiers, admiration figures, and gendarmes began to organize attacks in cafés and locations frequented by the French.

These counter-insurgency techniques were devised by a small group of French officers who prepared important reports like *La guerre moderne* by Roger Trinquier,[102] and the book on the techniques of counter-insurgency by David Galula, who had

also served in Algeria.[103] The thesis underlying what was called the *École Française* was the need to counter the insurgents' control of the population and to nullify their attempts to create an alternative legitimacy by means of 'parallel hierarchies' which would undermine the legitimacy of the colonial government.

This same group of warrior-scholars, linked both to Catholic integralism (like the group of *La Cité Catholique*) and the OAS (*Organisation de l'Armée Secrète*), transferred French-inspired ideas and techniques of counter-insurgency to South America.[104] One of them, General Paul Aussaresses, who had fought in Algiers under Trinquier (and who recently became famous in France for having admitted to using torture regularly in Algeria), would teach French counter-insurgency methods at Fort Braggs in North Carolina. It was now openly acknowledged that the world conflict was not solely military as instructors included not only specialists in the tactics of war but historians, sociologists, psychologists and economists. Between 1965 and 1972, Aussaresses' American pupils would launch in Vietnam the sadly famous counter-insurgency programme codenamed 'Phoenix', which 'neutralized' more than 80,000 Vietcong. In 1973, after finishing his period of teaching in America, Aussaresses moved to Brazil where he developed, under American supervision, a secret programme of collaboration among the South American military dictatorships. From this emerged the notorious systems of torture inflicted by 'death squads', irregular units who were responsible for thousands of 'desaparecidos', and for the famous Condor operation, which was devised at the *Escuela de las Américas* in Panama and was aimed at using terror to eradicate Soviet influence in Latin America.

In short, the input of French theoreticians of revolutionary war became prevalent in the approach to counter-insurgency thinking. This was by no means predictable. In the field of 'asymmetric war' another model was frequently referred to: this was the British system of opposing local resistance which was based on isolating the peasant population in New Villages placed under surveillance, and so severing their links with the guerrillas. The next step was to win over the consensus of the population by upholding the law and with economic support and other forms of aid aimed at creating a climate favourable to the government and at making it more difficult for the guerrillas to maintain a hold on the population. Such was the response to subversion in Malaya in the 1950s.[105]

4 The evil scourge

In line with the Truman doctrine and the policy of containment, devised by George Frost Kennan as a means of checking Soviet expansionism, in the late 1950s a more aggressive approach to the ongoing challenge was developed in the US administration. On 28 June 1961, the then Chairman of the Policy Planning Office of the Department of State, Walt Whitman Rostow (the economist behind the theory of the stages of economic growth),[106] gave a lecture at the US Warfare School which focused on the need to counterattack what was now perceived as worldwide subversion. For Rostow, events in Cuba, the Congo, and Laos plus

current events in Vietnam, made it imperative to respond to guerrilla warfare by adopting the same tactics. It was such thinking that would lead to America's greater involvement in Vietnam, which was strongly supported by Rostow on his appointment as special assistant for national security affairs. The new strategy of containment posited that there should be worldwide resistance as the various subversive movements furnished one another with support and the defeat of pro-Western forces in one country would lead, by a domino effect, to the overthrow of neighbouring countries.[107] The underlying idea, already under the Kennedy administration, was that the 'direct threat' (the atom bomb) was now no longer the only danger; it was now accompanied by an ever more insidious form of indirect aggression, against which America had to close ranks and prepare effective countermeasures to oppose those designated 'partisans, rebels and subversives'.[108]

At the same time, the repeated defeats to which the *foco* theory of revolution had led, and the beginning of the urbanization of the Third World, was shifting the theoretical axis of insurgency towards cities. Both Carlos Marighella, author of *Minimanual of the Urban Guerrilla*, a widely read text,[109] and Abraham Guillén, the theorist of the Tupamaros,[110] maintained that it was only in a city that a revolutionary war could be conducted. To take the war into people's houses requires another level of visibility: a robbery in a city bank is known and seen by all. Guevara's guerrilla war should move from the jungle to a cement jungle. Hence a sizeable theoretical part of Guevara's vanguardism continued to operate in urban terrorism. It is the function of a restricted political and military élite to arouse the masses and present them with the prospect of change by means of propaganda generated by the use of political violence.

In the late 1960s the switch to urban terrorism was carried forward by the Tupamaros, and by the Palestinian group Black September, which came into being as a result of Jordan's King Hussein's repression of Palestinians. The new type of terrorism soon spread through the world. In the USA in the early 1970s the Weathermen began to make use of explosives, as did the various European independence movements (IRA, ETA), and revolutionary ones (Brigate Rosse, Rote Armee Fraktion). At the centre of this new wave of insurgency was the situation created by the Israeli-Arab conflict after the Yom Kippur war (1973), which signalled the end of any hope that an Arab coalition could prevail in a military conflict with Israel. One consequence was the decidedly symbolic nature which the conflict, exacerbated by the invasion of Lebanon (1982), then assumed. The use of hijacking, which began in 1968 when the PFLP (Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine) seized an El Al plane and forced it to land in Rome, marks the beginning of transnational terrorism which had an essentially propaganda function of giving worldwide exposure to the oppression suffered by the Palestinians. The Palestinians not only hijacked planes and used car bombs but became a centre for training numerous ideologically subversive, anti-American movements.[111] It was a chaotic situation which saw the emergence of at least two terrorist organizations which, prior to al-Qaeda, carried out worldwide terrorism: these shady groups, established by Abu Nidal, and by Carlos, the Jackal, spread terror, supposedly in favour of the

Palestinian cause. They were effectively guns for hire which operated in the service of murky interests, using methods which revealed the actual convergence of terrorist strategies fomented by regional powers.

It was against this background, during the second Reagan administration, that a new conceptual approach to 'terrorism' emerged. In 1981 Claire Sterling's book had summarized the traditional way of understanding the problem: threatening the civilized world was a network of terror which was inspired, financed, trained and directed by the Soviet Union.[112] However, this conception which identified terrorism as a communist offshoot gave way to the notion that terrorism in itself was the global enemy. Between 1981 and 1986 the work of the US Subcommittee on Security and Terrorism clearly showed this process by which terrorism was reified and became an autonomous subject which had to be directly confronted while the actual producers of violence were marginalized.[113]

However, the real conceptual turning point was in 1986 with the publication of a book, *Terrorism. How the West Can Win*, edited by Benjamin Netanyahu, containing the proceedings of a conference organized in 1984 by the Jonathan Institute in Jerusalem.[114] In his foreword Netanyahu described the current situation as a struggle between the forces of civilization and barbarism. Within the international community there was a fair measure of agreement about the role of the Soviet Union and the PLO in supporting international terrorism and about the danger posed by the Islamic Republic of Iran, but what was lacking was a common response to terrorists and their sponsors because the concept of 'terrorism' was inadequately understood.

For Netanyahu, and this is the new element, the distinctive feature of terrorism is that it targets the innocent 'for the very fact of being innocent': 'Terrorism is the deliberate and systematic murder, maiming and menacing of the innocent to inspire fear for political ends.' It is absurd, he thinks, to conflate a terrorist act with civilian war losses: these are random, involuntary acts, whereas in the case of terrorists it is a 'wilful and calculated choice'. Terrorists are not guerrillas, who are irregular soldiers who fight against far superior forces, but instead attack defenceless objectives. The real key to terrorist strategy are the civilians who no one but a terrorist would class as combatants.[115]

Netanyahu conceded the case of the Second World War during which the doctrine of total war was declared, but he refers to this as a rare and difficult case. Instead terrorism breaks all the moral limits of war and plunges us into a world of barbarity, into 'impulses of a savage era before society submitted to the rule of law'. He further identified terrorism, which had become so prominent and violent because the PLO, with the backing of the Soviet Union, had begun hijacking aeroplanes. There was nothing random in the collaboration of Marxists and Islamic radicals, he wrote, as both communist totalitarianism and Islamic (and Arab) radicalism 'legitimize unbridled violence in the name of a higher cause, both are profoundly hostile to democracy, and both have found in terrorism an ideal weapon for waging war against it'.[116] We have here a series of ideas and definitions which were to acquire, as we have seen, wide acceptance.

It was Edward Said who, reviewing Netanyahu's book, latched on to the sense of an ongoing conceptual shift: 'As a word and concept, "terrorism" has acquired an extraordinary status in American public discourse. It has displaced communism as public enemy number one, although there are frequent efforts to tie the two together.' Netanyahu's definition of 'terrorism' 'depends a priori on a single axiom: "we" are never terrorists; it's the Moslems, Arabs and Communists who are (…) "we" are never terrorists, no matter what we may have done; "they" always are and always will be'.[117]

For Said, Netanyahu was fighting a battle based on a worldview 'which asserts that certain ideological and religious goals justify, indeed demand, the shedding of all moral inhibitions. In this context, the observation that the root cause of terrorism is terrorists is more than a tautology.'[118] The spurious excuse for fighting terrorism justifies any act of violence committed in its name. Said also seized on another significant element in the book, which is the conviction that Islam is a religion of terrorism. The famous scholar Bernard Lewis, whose theses inspired the US administration, maintained that 'it is appropriate to use Islam as a term of definition and classification in discussing present-day terrorism'.[119] Little does it matter that Christians and Jews have fought battles in the name of Christianity and Judaism that were as bloody as anyone else's. The crucial point for Lewis is the reassertion of the link between politics and religion which is maintained by Islam. An intellectual such as Noam Chomsky is of the opinion that the second Reagan administration's discovery of 'terrorism' as the new global enemy was an incentive to use terror as a means of reaction, as in the case of the raids on Tripoli and Bengasi in response to a terrorist attack in Germany in April 1986.[120]

In a radio broadcast of the same year, Reagan summarized the new approach with his customary directness:

> [in the past] effective antiterrorist action has also been thwarted by the claim that – as the quip goes – 'One man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter'. That's a catchy phrase, but also misleading. Freedom fighters do not need to terrorize a population into submission. Freedom fighters target the military forces and the organized instruments of repression keeping dictatorial regimes in power. Freedom fighters struggle to liberate their citizens from oppression and to establish a form of government that reflects the will of the people. Now, this is not to say that those who are fighting for freedom are perfect or that we should ignore problems arising from passion and conflict. Nevertheless, one has to be blind, ignorant, or simply unwilling to see the truth if he or she is unable to distinguish between those I just described and terrorists. Terrorists intentionally kill or maim unarmed civilians, often women and children, often third parties who are not in any way part of a dictatorial regime. Terrorists are always the enemies of democracy. Luckily, the world is shaking free from its lethargy and moving forward to stop the bloodshed.[121]

After 1989 and the fall of the Berlin wall, it was along these lines that the thesis, advanced by Paul Wolfowitz in 1992, gained ground that, after the collapse of the

USSR, terrorism was to be identified as the new enemy and a more aggressive military presence in the Middle East was justified. This option for a 'policy of pre-emption' was taken up again in a 2000 document by Republican leaders, which was signed not only by Wolfowitz but also by Donald Rumsfeld and Jeb Bush. The question posed by the document was how the USA could gain advantage from the new post-Cold War situation and preserve within it its global pre-eminence. The document, entitled *Project for the New American Century*, proposed a grand strategy based on a far greater capacity and willingness for military intervention.[122] Hence, Twin Towers was not the starting point for the new military strategy of attacking terrorism, but an event which allowed for the implementation of a strategy which had already been considered. In his speeches after 9/11 in which George W. Bush informed Americans of the War on Terror, it was made clear that the American people needed to know that 'we're facing a different enemy than we ever have faced'. On 20 January he clarified that, after the 1993 attack on the World Trade Center, the strategy chosen was to enforce the law and to class the attack as a crime. He then went on to say that 'the matter was not settled … The terrorists and their supporters declared war on the United States, and war is what they got.'[123]

The later evolution of the idea of 'terrorism' as global enemy shows that it was separated and actually excised from its previous use. The expression 'New Terrorism'[124] was coined and gained acceptance in the late 1990s when one could read that, while there once had been 'a relatively clear dividing line between terrorists and guerrillas, between political terrorists and criminal gangs, and between genuine home-grown terrorists and state-sponsored terrorism, today these lines have become blurred and the situation is even more confused than it used to be'.[125]

Stressing new aspects of terrorism in the last quarter of a century should not lead us to ignore the persisting continuities that we have here tried to indicate. None of the characteristics commonly attributed to New Terrorism, such as its increasing lethality, the motivating role of religion and the lack of clear political objectives, are completely convincing. Its greater capacity to inflict damage results from advances in military technology, which have always existed, as we have seen in the example of the car bomb which over time has become a deadly weapon in tactical and military terms. As for the tendency to see in New Terrorism something deriving from the seductive power of religion,[126] especially of Islam, as if from a kind of holy terror, centred on a liturgical and sacramental act quite distinct from secular terror, this relies on an unproven assumption of a substantial difference between religious and secular motivations: the former are supposedly more fanatical and intolerant than the latter but it is evident that groups with similar, secular or religious, motivations may or may not engage in terrorist action.[127] One may add that the greatest dispensers of terror in the last century, Nazism and Stalinism, were secular ideologies. Finally, in the case of New Terrorism, there would be no apparent room for political mediation as their use of violence is supposedly strategic and is both a means and an end. However, as has been pointed out, while militants are doubtless imbued with a spirit of self-sacrifice (which is neither unprecedented nor

specifically traceable to a religious ideology), the motivations of those blowing themselves up are often not religious but political.[128] Two examples: General Haji Bakr, the organizer of the IS army, was a colonel in Iraqi intelligence who was discharged and temporarily imprisoned in Abu Ghraib, he was a nationalist not an Islamist; and Osama Bin Laden's proclamations in the 1990s contained specific political requests, such as for the withdrawal of American troops from the holy sites, which were aimed at removing military backing from the dictatorial regimes of the region.[129] As it was expressed: we were attacked not because we were the enemy but because we were in the way.[130]

5 Conclusion: terrorism on the stage

Since the invention of the concept of 'terrorism', it has been a polemical term, a critical judgement on power and of its inclination to despotism. The study of terrorism, in the sense of the creation of 'terror' and how it has been variously implemented, obliges us not to consider it separately but as immersed in the realm of acts of violent political conflict. We have seen how difficult, if not impossible, it is to define it as an autonomous activity which is distinguishable both in terms of the chosen target or the weapons employed, and it has become clear that 'terrorism' and 'counter-terrorism' cannot be separated without causing serious damage to the concept: they are two diverse but convergent traditions.

In spite of these elementary considerations, recently, and especially after 9/11, terrorism has become a *passepartout* term, useful to indicate the illegitimate way to make war operated by an abstract figure, the terrorist, stigmatized as enemy of the Western civilization and/or humanity. The characterization of terrorism as a violent act perpetrated against innocents fits very well in the new mood of sacredness and discursive supremacy of violence and trauma in public discourse, a model – as we have seen – which rests on the basic contraposition of cruel perpetrator and innocent victim.[131] The fight between governments and 'terrorists' is so depicted as a battle of good versus evil, and the terrorism as an awful and obscure activity, barely understandable, conducted by fanatics, ready to martyrdom and other rabid practices, due to superstition rooted in cultures other than ours.

The lesson of history permits, on the contrary, another possible approach to 'terrorism', to consider it as symbolic production.[132] The roots of this alternative view lead back to a reconsideration of the concept of 'propaganda by the deed'. In the last quarter of the eighteenth century when, as we have seen, this conception originated, small anarchist groups who adhered to this idea believed that the energies of the 'people', that is, of enormous masses of peasants and artisans, were constrained by a kind of apathy or lethargy which prevented them from understanding the reasons for the struggle, held to be inevitable, for a more just society. Given that the popular masses were overwhelmingly illiterate, they could only be educated through the example of someone who, at the cost of personal sacrifice, showed in practical terms that what was tacitly considered impossible could actually be achieved. The people's dormant energies could only be 'awakened' by an

unexpected, attention-seizing and dramatic act, a bolt from the blue which would open the eyes of the masses to their own state of resignation, and give them the hope and confidence necessary for political action.

Nineteenth-century anarchists created a theory of the need of sudden, violent and striking actions, which were given extensive coverage by the nascent mass media which were beginning to use the new invention of photography.[133] Such actions, in keeping with the ideas of the anarchist movement, did not require a real hierarchical organization or specific preparation. They could be carried out by an individual or a small group of militants, and for that reason, as we have seen, such actions were easily manipulated by the political police of the time who soon discovered that 'terrorism' gave them a formidable means of intervening covertly in the internal affairs of other countries. This led to the further spreading of terror.

However, despite the opposing views of theoreticians of New Terrorism, there are actually strong elements of continuity between 'terrorism' as we nowadays know it and the traditional conceptualization of terrorist and revolutionary action which, as has been seen, was not primarily intended to create terror among the population of a nation but to conquer 'hearts and minds' of one's own people, that is, among those who are called upon to join the struggle and who must be shown that it is possible to win. The Cause will triumph on condition that others take up the heritage left by that vanguard, who by risking or sacrificing their lives, dared the impossible. Thus the enemy is symbolically killed through an action which is tantamount to raising a flag as a sign of recognition that is intended to produce identification.[134]

The purpose of a terrorist act is to create, by means of an image polarized on the we/you axis, a war scenario represented in absolute terms as a clash between good and evil. Such a war may be fought in reality but not won, and it is the very imbalance of forces in the field which necessitate an act which is able symbolically to make good the imbalance by giving it a distinctive profile. The terrorist act is aimed at activating a process of identification, and to show that an infinitely small and oppressed party is able to attack and defeat a significant objective, which, ideally, is the heart of an infinitely greater enemy. A terrorist act is thus a way of creating an image of the oppressor which highlights the desire for liberation of the people being oppressed and its very existence as an alternative subject. Such an act may entail killing heads of government or top public servants, attacking significant military objectives or even destroying highly symbolic buildings. In delineating a total conflict, which, far being a 'terrorist' invention, is, as we have seen, part of the way that armed conflict has developed over the past two centuries, the enemy ends by being represented by all members of the community, including non-combatants, which is oppressing one's own people and even by those offering assistance, support and solidarity to the oppressors. Hence the terrorist act may even target the unarmed who, according to this transfigured and symbolic vision, are not such at all but are co-responsible for the abuse of power against which the action is being implemented and are flesh of the same blood as the enemy being targeted.

Seen in this way, a 'terrorist' act has four distinctive and defining characteristics.[135]

First, the group instigating the action is conspiratorial, secret and covert.[136] Reasons of security, even when the terrorist group forms part of a greater political movement, impose the need to cloak their identity and organization. This secrecy, whose purpose is to protect their operational capacity from disruptive measures, is also an excellent terrain in which outside elements can manoeuvre and manipulate them. Their very lack of exposure facilitates infiltration and the possibility of manipulation.

The second characteristic of 'terrorism' is unpredictability. While uncertainty is typical of anyone entering a violent conflict, in the case of terrorism it reaches its very extreme.[137] 'Terrorism' is unforeseeable both in its timing, like guerrilla warfare, but also in its choice of objectives and its modes of action. 'The discrepancy between the secrecy of planning and the visibility of results gives it even more shock value.'[138] This is in stark contrast with life in peacetime, which is based on routine. In a time of peace, a 'terrorist' act brings war and shows one's own people that even the enemy, including the 'enemy' population, must bear its dramatic burden.

The third characteristic of a terrorist act is its ability to create a temporary bridge between clearly imbalanced forces and thus reveal a possibility which is unimaginable in the situation of classic armed conflict:[139] that is, it may happen that the weaker side is able, even for a short time, to get the better of its more powerful enemy. In a word, a 'terrorist act' makes it possible to achieve what would be difficult in a 'real' war: despite possessing far inferior strength, the 'terrorist' is able to inflict considerable harm on the enemy and to win a small, limited but significant victory.

The fourth and final characteristic of a terrorist act is its symbolic nature,[140] which means that its psychological effects override its actual physical and military effects.[141] Its aim is to deliver a message and to do so with enormous visibility. This gives it a scope which perfectly merges with theories of psychological action,[142] and of revolutionary war. Once again the real object of attention is to control the shifts in public opinion and hence the crucial role of media exposure.[143] Even when a terrorist act is defined as an act of war centred on the physical elimination (symbolic rather than real) of the enemy, it is also a substantial part of another, and no less significant, battle: the battle to win over the consensus of public opinion, of one's own public opinion. Hence, in addition to being a symbolic act of destruction, a terrorist deed is also a rhetorical move which makes sense in media and psychological, rather than in military, terms.[144] 'Revolutionary terrorism' needs publicity and seeks it out.[145] The potency of acts of violence, which are often carefully prepared in advance, is such as to seize the attention not only of the public but also of the media, which finds itself entangled in the so-called Beirut syndrome.[146]

Moreover, thanks to media exposure, the terrorist act attracts the attention of isolated individuals who do not belong to any organization but who feel 'involved' by its symbolic value and by its ability to proclaim, loudly and clearly, the message of the Cause. In other words, it activates a process of identity construction of a 'community of ideas and principles'[147]and disseminates to the world, and above all

to potential adherents, the values underlying the action and it exposes the wrongs inflicted and their partial, symbolic reparation by means of revenge. In a world which is globalized and dominated by the media, these are elements which are given massive attention. With news breaking all around us, these actions may be 'filtered' but nevertheless they are enormously blown up and are turned into media spectacles. In this way 'terrorism' finds an audience to which, in keeping with its historical past, it is perfectly attuned: the global stage.

Notes

1 C. Townshend, *Making the Peace: Public Order and Public Security in Modern Britain*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993, p. 116.
2 J. H. Michaels, *The Discourse Trap and the US Military. From the War on Terror to the Surge*, Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.
3 See V. Harle, *The Enemy with a Thousand Faces. The Tradition of the Other in Western Political Thought and History*, Westport CT and London: Praeger, 2000.
4 D. L. Cloud, 'Flying while Arab. The Clash of Civilizations and the Rhetoric of Racial Profiling in the American Empire', in H. D. O'Hair, R. L. Heath, K. J. Ayotte and G. R. Ledlow (eds), *Terrorism. Communication and Rhetorical Perspectives*, Cresskill NJ: Hampton Press, 2008, p. 225.
5 In the 1990s, of the 490 articles published in the two leading journals specializing in the subject, only 13 dealt with its historical aspect: M. Ranstorp (ed.), *Mapping Terrorism Research. State of Art, Gaps and Future Direction*, London and New York: Routledge, 2007, p. 12.
6 R. Jackson, 'The Core Commitments of Critical Terrorism Studies', *European Political Science*, 6/3 (2007), p. 244.
7 A. Richards, *Conceptualizing Terrorism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015, pp. 3–9.
8 S. Miller, *Terrorism and Counter-terrorism. Ethics and Liberal Democracy*, Maiden MA and Oxford: Blackwell, 2009, p. 26.
9 See the far from convincing definition of extremism advanced by Gus Martin, *Understanding Terrorism: Challenges, Perspectives, and Issues*, 3rd edn, Los Angeles: Sage, 2010, pp. 4–5; and in his *Essentials of Terrorism: Concepts and Controversies*, 3rd edn, Thousand Oaks CA: Sage, 2014, according to which extremists of all ideologies share similarities. This is a thesis that can be argued but cannot be demonstrated and certainly not by citing as incarnation of the typical extremist, Jacques Vergès, Stalinist, Maoist but also, as a lawyer, defender of the Algerian rebels, Klaus Barbie, Palestinian terrorists and the activists of Action directe (ibid., p. 11, note).
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12 See, for example, I. Primoratz, *Terrorism: A Philosophical Investigation*, Cambridge: Polity, 2013, p. 24; and also Martin, *Essentials*, p. 7.
13 Richards, *Conceptualizing*, p. 75.
14 D. Tucker and C. J. Lamb, 'Restructuring Special Operations Forces for Emerging Threats', *Strategic Forum*, No. 219, Washington DC: Institute for National Strategic Studies, National Defense University, January 2006, pp. 1–6, at p. 1.
15 M. Crenshaw, 'The Psychology of Terrorism: An Agenda for the 21st Century', *Political Psychology*, 21/2 (2000), pp. 405–20, at p. 409. See also the discussion and bibliography in E. González Calleja, *El laboratorio del miedo. Una historia general del terrorismo de los sicarios a Al Qa'ida*, Barcelona: Crítica, 2013, pp. 43–9.

16 S. Ozeren, I. D. Gunes and D. M. Al-Badayneh (eds), *Understanding Terrorism: Analysis of Sociological and Psychological Aspects*, Amsterdam, Berlin, Oxford, Tokyo and Washington DC: IOS Press, 2007, p. 25.
17 J. Friedrichs, 'Defining the International Public Enemy: The Political Struggle behind the Legal Debate on International Terrorism', *Leiden Journal of International Law*, 19/1 (March 2006), pp. 69–91, at p. 89.
18 The US labelled as terrorist insurgents groups such as FARC and the Tamil Tigers, and movements such as the African National Congress; Israel in turn (and for a long time the USA) defined the PLO as a terrorist organization. Once attached, labels take on a kind of life of their own. This definition has been one of the principal obstacles to the peace process in the Middle East: W. Rosenau, *Subversion and Insurgency*, Santa Monica CA: Rand Counterinsurgency Research Study. Occasional paper 2, 2007.
19 As is shown in the case of the MKO, a group of Marxist activists opposed to the Iranian regime. It appeared on the American black list of international terrorist organizations because it was supported and financed by Saddam Hussein when he was considered out of control; later, when Iraq was invaded, it was delisted and favoured as an anti-Iranian force: Martin, *Essentials*, p. 9.
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21 W. Laqueur, *The Age of Terrorism*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1987, p. 178.
22 A position obviously criticized by popular right-wing press: see J. Goldberg, *The Tyranny of Clichés. How Liberals Cheat in the War of Ideas*, New York: Penguin, 2012, p.5.
23 A. P. Schmid and P. J. Jongman (eds), *Political Terrorism: A New Guide to Actors, Authors, Concepts, Data Bases, Theories and Literature*, Amsterdam and New Brunswick NJ: SWIDOC and Transaction Books, 1988, pp. 1–32.
24 This is the standard definition given by the English Terrorism Act (2000) adopted by MI5, the English secret service: D. J. Whittaker, *The Terrorism Reader*, London and New York: Routledge, 2001, p. 1.
25 This is the definition given by the FBI: W. D. Perdue, *Terrorism and the State. A Critique of Domination through Fear*, New York, Westport CT and London: Praeger, 1989, p. 2.
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31 Crenshaw, *Terrorism in Context*, p. 9.
32 Edward Said, 'Identity, Negation and Violence', *New Left Review*, 171 (September–October 1988), pp. 46–60, at p. 48.
33 '[P]remeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against non-combatant targets by subnational groups or clandestine agents', Rosenau, *Subversion*, p. 2.
34 '[I]ntended to cause death or serious bodily harm to civilians or non-combatants with the purpose of intimidating a population or compelling a government or an international organization to do or abstain from doing any act': Richards, *Conceptualizing*, p. 48.

35 D. Rapoport, 'The Four Waves of Modern Terror: International Dimensions and Consequences', in Hanhimäki and Blumenau, *International History of Terrorism*, p. 302, note 4.
36 See, for example, Laqueur, *Age of Terrorism*, pp. 12–13; C. C. Combs, *Terrorism in the 21st Century*, Boston MA: Little Brown, 1993, p. 11; J. M. Lutz and B. J. Lutz, *Global Terrorism*, 3rd edn, London and New York: Routledge, 2014, p. 73.
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38 Hence the term took on the meaning of hired killers whereas in the case under consideration they were fighters for the independence of the Jewish people. Their existence is best known for the celebrated account in *The Jewish War*, written by Josephus, a Jewish historian who shifted to the Roman side, which recounted not only the Roman conquest of Jerusalem and the destruction of the second Temple but also the siege of Masada, the last stronghold remaining in the hands of the Sicarii. Josephus tells how its last defenders committed collective suicide rather than surrender to the Romans.
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40 The militants of this group, entrenched in an isolated zone between Persia and Syria, opposed Sunni Seljuk rule, especially in the period between the twelfth and early fourteenth centuries. The few extant sources, for the most part hostile, called them 'assassins' and the term was later taken up to indicate murderers.
41 The reason why they are included in the literature on 'terrorism' perhaps lies in the influence exercised by the illustrious Jewish-American medievalist and Islamic scholar Bernard Lewis, author of a monograph on the sect and also adviser to the Bush administration and theoretician of the existence of a cultural gap between Islamic culture and Western civilization, see: *The Assassins: A Radical Sect in Islam*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1967; *The Crisis of Islam. Holy War and Unholy Terror*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 2003.
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95 Ibid., p. 187.
96 Ibid., p. 190.
97 Ibid., pp. 197–8. In support of the notion that a similar strategy was in current use two examples are adduced: the burning of the Reichstag in 1933, which was a Nazi ruse, and the particularly bitter conflict between Poles and Ukrainians in Wolhynia during the war, supposedly provoked by a covert action carried out by Soviet intelligence in 1942.
98 Ibid., pp. 202–3.
99 'The aim of any action in the system of enlightened terror is to evoke a psychological process and implant and amplify its effects in the consciousness of the resonant mass'

(ibid., pp. 213–14). Clearly, to achieve these goals, propaganda strategies are implemented that engage the 'resonant mass', which must be as far as possible 'lively, colourful, dramatic, that is, dynamic. But it is not important that it follow the truth in detail. The system of enlightened terror leaves it up to the opponent to take the trouble and effort to collect the proofs that the propaganda does not correspond to facts' (p. 214).

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124 See, for example, D. Benjamin and S. Simon, *The Age of Sacred Terror: Radical Islam's War against America*, New York: Random House, 2003; I. O. Lesser, B. Hoffman, J. Arquilla, D. Ronfeldt, M. Zanini, and B. M. Jenkins, *Countering the New Terrorism*, Santa Monica CA: Rand Corporation, 1999.
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